KnightQuest!

#125

DC'S DARK KNIGHT DIRECTOR DIALOGS

DENNY O'NEIL

DARK SHADOWS [illegible] ARTIST

[illegible]

SUPERM[illegible]

BATMAN MO[illegible]

SERIAL STAR—

LYLE TALBOT

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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detail from robin #1, new series courtesy of dc comics

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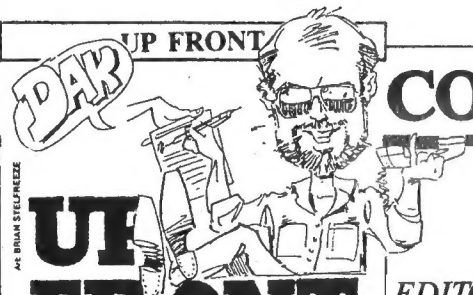

ART: BRIAN STELFREEZE

UP FRONT

It seems but yesterday that I was proudly writing the editorial celebrating the 25th spectacular issue of COMICS INTERVIEW, and then, in rapid succession, notes for landmark issues #50, #75 and #100.

I remember **Stan Lee** scripting a phenomenal 100 issues of FANTASTIC FOUR, and then breaking the barrier and going beyond — but not by too far. I remember many a living comics legend announcing intentions of remaining 100 issues or more on a title, but few of them actually following through.

And now, to my own consummate and profound amazement, here I am writing an astonishing acknowledgement on the occasion of COMICS INTERVIEW #125.

The life of this publication has spanned perhaps the most awesome and unexpected evolution anyone could have envisioned for the comics medium, an ever astounding economic anomaly in the face of a global recession that borders on Depression.

Who knows what the future holds? No one, really. Retailers, distributors, publishers, creators and, of course, readers all have their own opinions. But whatever awaits ahead, there's one thing it seems you can be sure of:

Count on COMICS INTERVIEW to be here, inside the industry, doing what we do best, covering the comics field in all its myriad aspects.

Remember: we don't just promise. We deliver. That's the secret of our success!

-Dave

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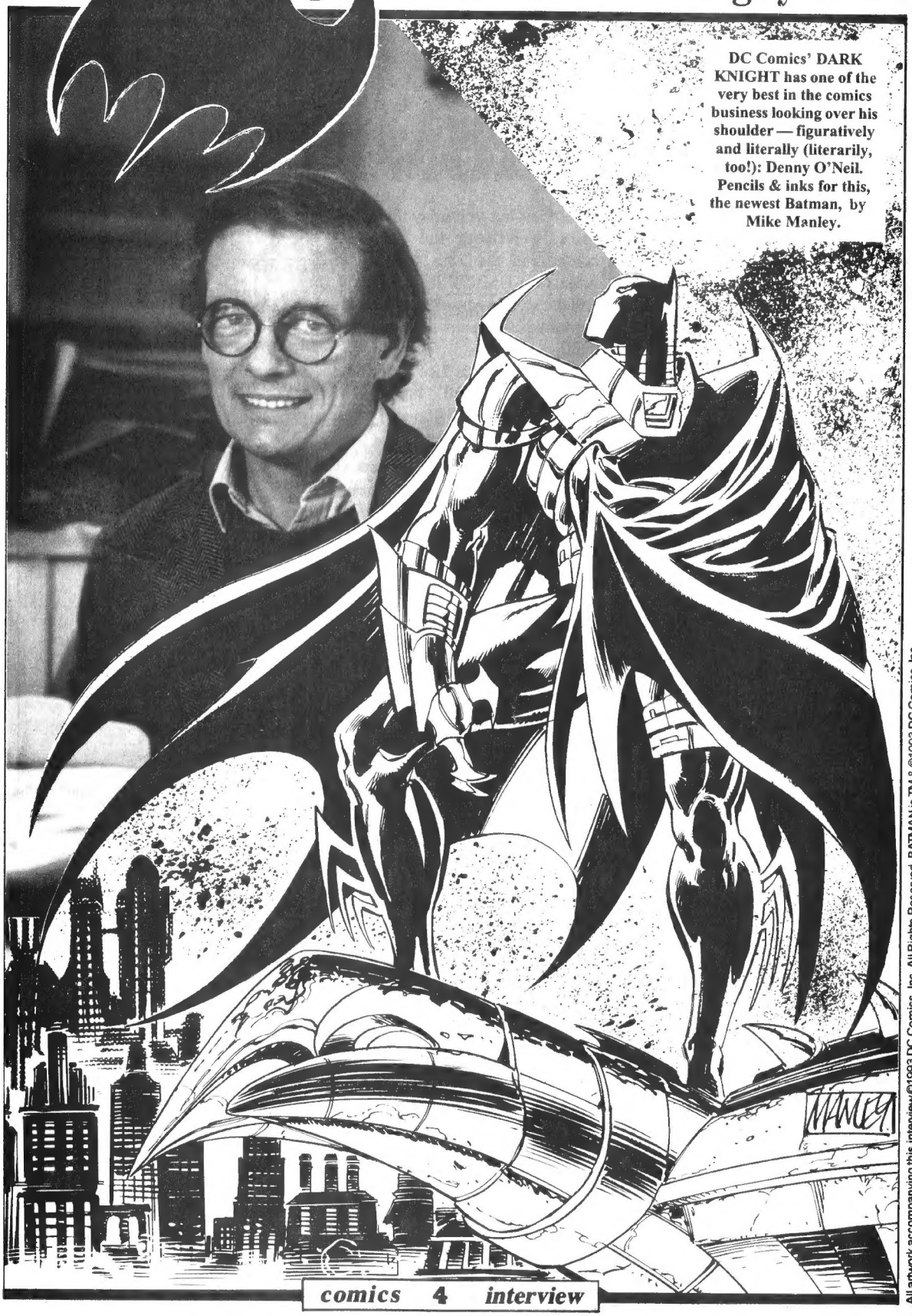

DC Comics' DARK KNIGHT has one of the very best in the comics business looking over his shoulder — figuratively and literally (literarily, too!): Denny O'Neil. Pencils & inks for this, the newest Batman, by Mike Manley.

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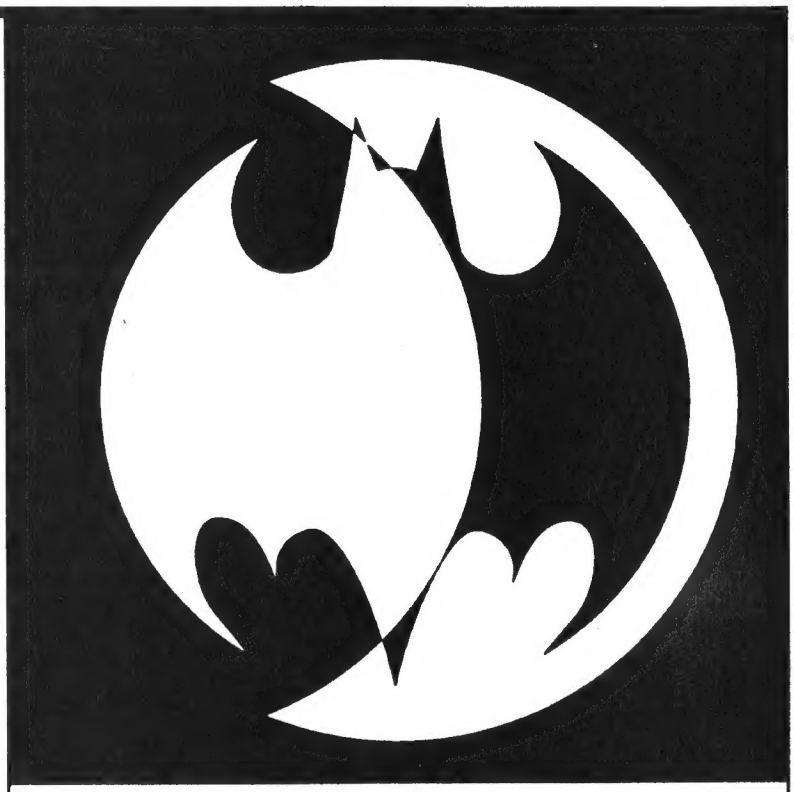
been physical all his life, suddenly deprived of that."



In a summer crowded by product, the Batman titles rise above the pack. In a field of giants, Dennis O'Neil rises above the pack as well. The architect behind the summer "Knightfall" and "Knightquest" storylines, O'Neil is uniquely qualified to steer the direction of a 54-year-old legend's most dramatic changes. With Bruce Wayne crippled, with a new Dark Knight on the horizon, the Batman titles are setting standards for the industry to follow. And Dennis O'Neil, whose life and career has been intertwined with Batman's (they both first appeared in May 1939), stands prepared to take Batman forward into the next millennium. In an afternoon conversation with DC's Batman editor, we spoke of the changes upcoming for the dark knight of the heroic myth, of metafiction, and of the challenges of being caretaker of a 20th century legend.

MARK LUCAS: *Is Bruce Wayne out of commission for Batman for good?*

DENNY O'NEIL: Well, he's out of commission as Batman. As Bruce Wayne, he will be very active. We're going to play with the idea of a guy who's been very physical all of his life, suddenly deprived of that yet with a problem he feels he must solve. We'll see where that will take us.

MARK: *What problem is that?*

DENNY: In about an issue, Robin's father and the doctor who's been treating both him and Bruce Wayne, Dr. Shondra Kinsolving, are kidnapped, apparently by terrorists. There doesn't seem to be any reason for this. It's like a motiveless crime. Bruce decides he bears some responsibility for this and decides to use his detective skills to find out what has happened. So, for about a year, he will be tracing around the world, first in a wheelchair, then with Alfred, and maybe later on crutches or a cane. He'll be looking for clues and trying to trace down these two people. These will not be talking heads stories. It'll be a challenge to get action into them. But, that's what we're supposed to do, solve problems like that.

MARK: *You'll be refocusing on Bruce Wayne/Batman as a detective?*

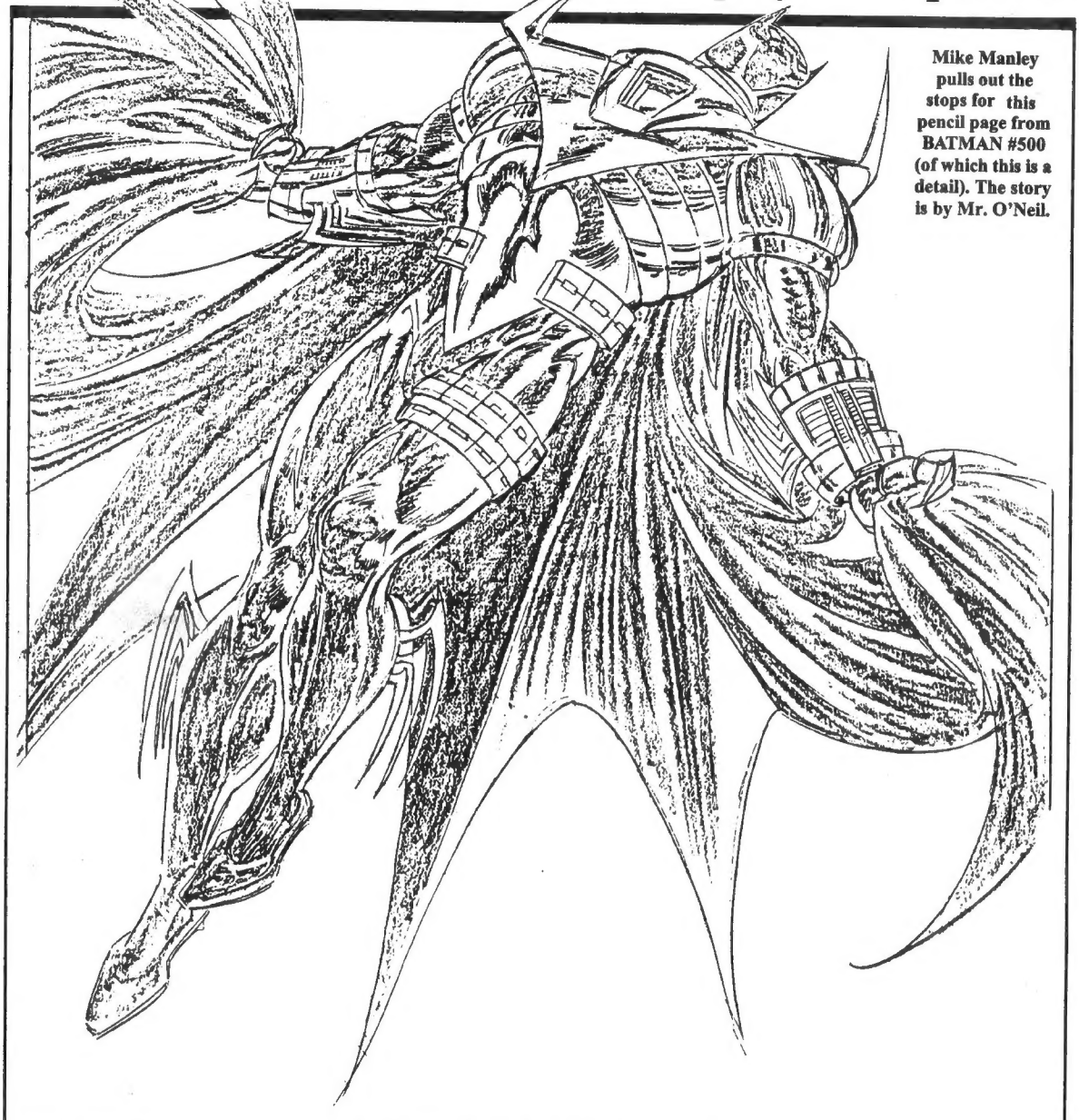
DENNY: On Bruce Wayne as a detective. The first two stories will appear in JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE #5 and #6 written by me, co-starring Bronze Tiger whom, weirdly enough, I created about twenty years ago for an ill-remembered title called RICHARD DRAGON, KUNG-FU FIGHTER, and an interesting new character the Justice League folks came up with, Gypsy. Green Arrow also makes an appearance in the second of these stories. The story will then be picked up by **Alan Grant**. That will take Bruce Wayne to England, which will be in three issues of SHADOW OF THE BAT. It will end with a final three-issue arc that will appear in LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT, written by me. I have no idea who the artist will be as yet. Bruce is going to be out of Gotham City

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dennis O'Neil.
Age: 54.
Born: 1939 — St. Louis, MO.
Current Residence: Brooklyn, NY.
Greatest Influences: Stan Lee and Will Eisner.
Current Influences: Currently influenced more by non-fiction. (Hint to writers: You are more likely to get story ideas from non-fiction.)
Favorite Work of Own: "There Is No Hope in Crime Alley" (most influential and most fond of); the entire 36 issues of THE QUESTION ("probably the most personal work I've ever done"); the Ra's Al Ghul stories from BATMAN; and GREEN LANTERN / GREEN ARROW.

SPOTLIGHT: KNIGHTQUEST

"Azrael . . . Bane, we knew would play an important



Mike Manley pulls out the stops for this pencil page from BATMAN #500 (of which this is a detail). The story is by Mr. O'Neil.

but very, very busy.

MARK: *And what about Gotham City?*

DENNY: That's the other part of the story. That's ol' — as we'll call him — Azbats. With BATMAN #500 the story bifurcates. We'll be following Bruce in "Knightquest: The Search." Meanwhile, back in Gotham with "Knightquest: The Crusade," we'll be looking at Jean-Paul Vallee assuming the identity of Batman, changing his costume, and, I think, more interestingly, changing his modus operandi. It will be a very different version of Batman, not only in appearance but in the way he operates: the kinds of things he does, people's reactions to him.

All of this is complicated because of the fact that a lot of what makes Jean-Paul able to function as a hero happens below the threshold of his consciousness. He himself does not know what he is capable of or how he will react in a given situation. It'll be an interesting way to look at the superhero in the context of stories that we hope will be everything you buy a superhero comic for — or at least everything you buy a DC superhero comic for: A lot of emphasis on story. I tend to employ very, very skilled writers. One of the things I think we succeed in doing is making everything reasonably self-contained. This will all be part of a very large, 30-something-part macrostory. But, within that, you won't need to read 2-3 issues to get a complete story, beginning-middle-and-end. Everything you need to know to understand this story will be contained within it. If we do our jobs properly, the information will be given in the context of this plot, what you're looking at here-and-now. We'll try not to interrupt the story to give you a lot of back-information. It will all be integrated into an ongoing plot. So I count very heavily on the skill of my writers. But, then, I employ very skilled writers.

MARK: *It sounds like you have a very definite conclusion to this story. Does*

part from the start. Some other stuff was lucky accidents."

that mean we should expect Bruce Wayne back as Batman?

DENNY: Not yet. I hope to have a definite conclusion by the end of this summer. I will meet with **Doug Moench, Chuck Dixon,** and **Scott Peterson** in San Diego. The great gathering of the tribes once a year there. If all goes well, we'll be able to get an afternoon out of the city. If I have my way, we'll drive down to Mexico or up into the mountains or something and just walk around and try to figure out how the story is going to end. I'm not being coy. We have some ideas of how we'd like to present the ending, which would be in five double-sized books. You won't have to buy them all in the same week, however! What exactly that ending is going to be, I hope to know by September.

MARK: *Should we expect Bruce Wayne back as Batman?*

DENNY: I don't really know. Some of it will depend on my trying to judge readers' reactions between now and then. What **Stan Lee** used to say is true — we do pay attention to the feedback we get. For a number of reasons, I'm curious to see how the readers react to Azbats or the character of Azrael. We introduced him in a mini-series last year, and frankly the reception was disappointing. That's not a secret. **Archie Goodwin** said as much in the introduction to the paperback version. Now, the books are getting a belatedly good reputation and are selling for many times the cover price on the back issue market. I've heard a lot of compliments about the story and the art from people who read the paperback and who didn't see the original issues. So, there's some interest in Azrael, and we'll see what happens with that too before we make final decisions about the fate of these guys.

MARK: *Was Azrael introduced as the intended new Batman from the start?*

DENNY: Absolutely. That part was done with malice aforethought. Unfortunately, we couldn't advertise that at the time. So, we worked hard to make it a series people would find interesting in and for itself. Both Azrael and Bane, we knew they would serve an important part in the Batman continuity from the start. We've been working on "Knightfall" for about two years. Azrael and Bane were created to serve the function they eventually served. Some other stuff was just lucky accidents.

MARK: *Are such attention-getting stories — like Batman being replaced — required nowadays to increase sales?*

DENNY: Well, I don't think so. I think a lot of things can increase sales. I think probably that question is in the context of **Mike Carlin's** "Death of Superman" storyline. What this is really about is, two years ago when obviously I didn't know whether sales would be good or bad — my crystal ball isn't too the accurate — I did have sense based on 26 years of experience, now 28, that the series would need a figurative slap in the face about now, that it might be kind of getting routine. So, we set about answering the question, what could we do that would be unexpected, that would get us really interested. As a general rule, if the creative people are really involved in a storyline, that will involve the readers as well. Everybody will be doing their best work. And, people who really like comics as a narrative form will respond to that. The speculators, well, that's the luck of the draw what they decide will be, what they decide will be worth buying. But, what we work hard to do is to provide a strong storyline. From our very first discussions, this seemed like a very strong storyline. It has had the effect of raising sales, but it was mostly intended to wake everybody up on Batman based on just a guess on my part that we would need to do that about now

MARK: *Was there trepidation about fooling around with a 50+-year-old legend?*

DENNY: Oh, sure. We're already getting

AZRAEL art by Joe Quesada and Kevin Nowlan.

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"Basically, we're making this up as y[illegible]g"

From DETECTIVE COMICS #667 — details of pencils by Graham Nolan. (Note: The small "x" marks are indications of fully-blackened areas for the inker to fill in.)

the hate mail. I've done a lot of radio and television about this, and twice I've gotten attacked on live radio, as recently as yesterday. That's what happens when you play with, as you say, a 50-year-old legend. It shouldn't stop us from doing it because, if we put these characters in amber, like the mosquitos in JURASSIC PARK, everybody would say, "That's fine, that's nice," but after awhile nobody would read them. Superman and Batman have been in continuous publication for 55 and 54 years, respectively. Characters would not survive as popular characters if they did not change. To my sketchy recollection, there have been five Batmen over the years. None of them have been wrong. All have been right for their era. The trick is to allow a character to evolve and yet to preserve the essence of that character, to let the externals change but keep the archetype intact. So, storylines like the one we're currently doing are just an elaborate way of doing that. If we were still publishing the Batman I loved as a kid, I would still love it, but it would have nothing to say to a contemporary audience.

MARK: *You said there were five Batmen?*

DENNY: Yes, there have been five fairly radical different versions of the character. In the '60s, he was a comedian, in effect. In the '50s, he was a daytime character. In the '70s and early '80s, he was a soap opera character. There was a stretch when he was primarily a detective character. He started and is currently this dark, obsessed creature of the night. But, there have been five fairly distinct interpretations and gradients within each interpretation. As I said, I'm not prepared to say any of them are wrong. I'm prepared to say I personally have trouble reading some of them. But, I'm not a 13-year-old who was alive at the time they were being published. There is a lot less right and wrong in these things than people think. When people say, "That's wrong," what it usually means is, "I don't like this," if you get to the root of their reactions.

MARK: *Is the new Azrael Batman the next one in the stages?*

DENNY: We'll see. To some extent, we're terra incognito. We're making it up as we go along. One of the things I think the academics haven't gotten onto about comics yet is that we're doing something that's never been done before in the history of narrative, at least **Mike Carlin** and I. We are dealing with characters who have been in continuous publication in the same medium — as well as other media — for over 50 years and continue to be visible several times a month. And, we're integrating their stories into a kind of macro-story, a big saga which is the DC Universe. It's something that's never been done in the history of storytelling. Consequently, more often than not, we're guessing. Basically, we're making it up as we go along because no one's done this before.

MARK: *On that, what impact do you think comics have had as an artform?*

DENNY: I think that eventually people will see what we're doing is having an influence on television in particular, maybe on movies, possibly on novels, but nil when it comes to short stories and

"Comics have evolved immensely since I've been involved."

theater. Comics and soap opera have pioneered this kind of serial form. But we do it in a very different way than soap opera. There characters are life-sized. Ours are much larger than life. We're trying to combine instant mythology, taking archetypes and realizing them as characters that modern people can identify with, and embedding them in this . . . the only word I can come up with when I'm speaking of this is what I've coined *metafiction,* this great big macrocosmic story. Within that, because of the demands of craftsmanship, to try to present this in discrete units, as classically plotted beginning-middle-and-end, the three stage plot that has been used for movies, for drama. I think we're having an influence. I'll probably be dead before anyone knows how much of what kind of influence.

MARK: *You've been involved in this industry for 28 years. How do you keep it fresh for yourself.*

DENNY: Partially the job keeps it fresh, because comics have changed and evolved immensely since I've started, very different in terms of the business of publishing and in terms of what we do, particularly in the last ten years. In just trying to keep up with what's going on, and part of my job is hopefully to keep a half step ahead of what's going on. If I try to do that honestly and well, that forces me to stay awake. As a writer, I try and change my act every so often. My advice to any writer who's been doing the same kind of work for over 20 years is, every so often throw out 30% of your bag of tricks. Try to make it hard for yourself. If you've written as many scripts as I have, it's not impossible to go on automatic pilot. I think I know every trick there is. But, that will be a kind of controlled boredom if I do that. In some mysterious, alchemical way, my boredom inevitably translates itself to the readers. So, if it's hard, I may be frustrated and angry, but I won't be bored.

MARK: *What's the greatest change you've seen in comics?*

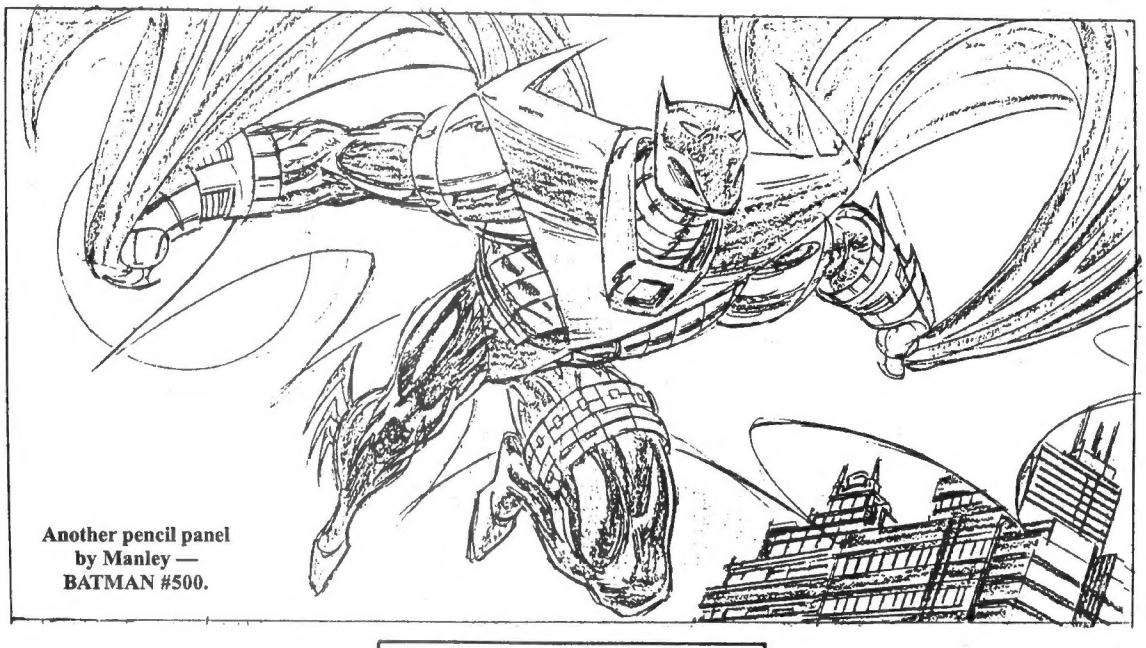
DENNY: The level of sophistication. In the field overall . . . comics are a native American artform, and like all native American artforms, we had to be appreciated in Europe before we were appreciated here. One of the things we've gotten from Europe and Asia is that comics are good for a lot of different things. The form, as a form, is a lot less limited. We're seeing that reflected, for example, in the work **Karen Berger's** doing with Vertigo. As for what I do, the stories and the characterization and the approach is much, much more sophisticated than what was being done ten years ago, much less than when I started. One of the greatest charms of comics when I started was that there were zero expectations. Everybody expected it to be drek. So, if you were one micron better than drek, you were great. Now, there are standards. I really hate to say this, but we are being recognized as a valid artform. I think that's a mine field, but it's one we're going to have to learn how to negotiate. Again, a very long answer to a simple question. Sophistication within each genre of comics and a recognition that comics as a form can handle almost any genre.

MARK: *Do you feel, then, that Batman's limited by his superhero aspects?*

DENNY: Only insofar as we're working out of a tradition of heroic fiction. For example, people tend to use the word melodrama as a pejorative. I don't. Melodrama is a genre, as are tragedy and comedy. If you're going to stay true to the essence of the character, he comes out of that warrior-hero tradition, sort of combined with the demon tradition. Batman is an icon who is very dark. It's sort of like taking a devil figure and making him a hero. There's a kind of mingling of traditional line in there. But, basically, Batman and most of the superheroes are out of a tradition of heroic fiction in our literature that goes back to Gilgamesh. Insofar as that tradition has limits, yes. But, I think that there is a tremendous amount of elbow room and certainly a large amount of unexplored possibilities in that tradition. For example, look where **the Beatles** took rock'n'roll which, when it first appeared in the '50s, was considered to be a very limited form, capable of expressing not much more than animal exuberance. There are limits, but they are a lot further out there than anyone knows, and we haven't come close to reaching them yet.

MARK: *Do you, as editor of Batman, plan to take the line into those realms, at least a little?*

DENNY: Yes, I hope so. I would like to believe that we have pushed the envelope



Another pencil panel by Manley — BATMAN #500.

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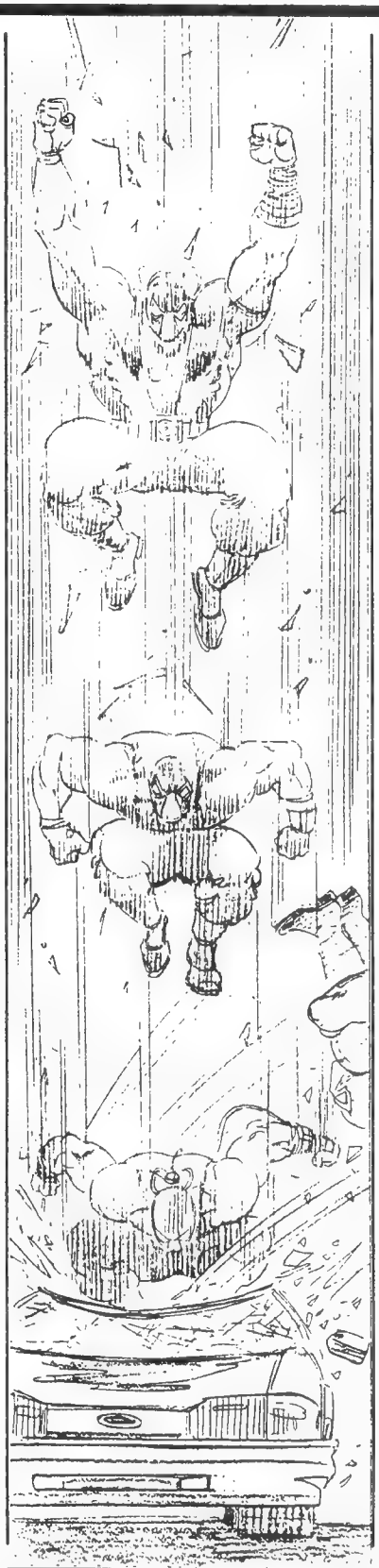
"I have in front of me a computer screen with more

a little bit already. To echo one of your earlier questions, if we're going to keep it interesting for ourselves, we're going to have to keep pushing. We're going to have to try to draw nearer and nearer to those limits. And, by the time we get to them, circumstances may have changed, and they may be non-existent or pushed back another three light years. I don't know. Again, there's nothing we can look to for guidance as we try to predict the future because nobody's done this before . . . to do what, not only myself but **Mike Carlin** and many other superhero editors to one degree or another in this position are working in, which is a mutation of an old form, but a mutation that is real distinct and one that no one quite understands yet. **Mike Carlin** and I, our jobs are maybe a little bit more complicated by the longevity of our characters. Sherlock Holmes had, what, 60-something stories? We do nearly that many Batman stories each year, and the character goes back 54 years. And, there's something else I really try not to think about. Mike and I are working on characters who are recognizable to probably 80% of the people on the planet. When we did the death of Robin a few years ago, I had to really revise my own thinking about what I did for a living, because up to that point, I thought, "These are stories. I'm a fiction writer. I'm a fiction editor. I'm turning out a series of stories." But, the extraordinary reaction to the death of Robin made me realize that I'm not that. I'm the custodian of folklore. These are post-industrial folk figures. Because, even if you've not read a comic book in 20 years or never read a comic book, Batman and Superman and maybe a few of the others are part of your consciousness. You have a kind of relationship to them, a psychological relationship, maybe tenuous. Simply because everyone knows who they are and everybody knows approximately what they're about, they're a lot more than simple fictional characters. I'm a custodian of folklore which, again, is something that might paralyze you if you thought about it. You have to be aware of all that stuff and then ignore it, or the temptation would be to serve as a preserver of the tradition. If you do that, the tradition gets very stale and very bored, respected as a tradition but not loved as an entertainment.

MARK: *It's the new mythology.*

DENNY: Yes, that's exactly it. That was a buzzword in the '60s, and I thought at the time, "Yeah, uh-huh, sure, right." But, I was hired to give a lecture on comics and mythology a couple of years ago. I had six



months to prepare it, so I had time to do research on it. And, I kept coming up with the fact that comics are a new mythology. Given that we're living in a vastly different world than the world when the traditional ancient myths were created, it's pretty much followed the same evolutionary path and pretty much follows the same rules. It looks like it's going in the same direction. So, once I would have scoffed at that idea or thought that was just comic book people trying to inflate their own importance. Now, I think it's absolutely accurate. Even the screw-ups, even the inconsistencies are similar to the inconsistencies, say, in the story of Zeus. And probably for approximately the same reasons. The difference is that we do everything on a greatly accelerated time scale. It used to take 20 generations for a myth to evolve. Now it probably takes 20 years, if that.

MARK: *That's probably because of the global media now.*

DENNY: Yes. There's a European scholar named **Ernest Casserir** who says somewhere that a myth is a story that 20 generations could agree on. With Batman, there have probably been 10 editors, close to 200 writers (I'm just guessing), a lot of artists, a few publishers, and a few outside people like radio and television people who have had some say in shaping it. So, Batman, although he's only 54 years old, is only a story or the end product of what a lot of people have agreed on. It didn't take 20 generations because there are so many more people and communication happens so much more quickly. So, what we have is instant mythology. But, the kind of process of shaping the story as it passes through different sensibilities just happens a lot faster.

MARK: *It seems like Archie Goodwin is given a little more free reign to do alternative Batman stories like NIGHT CRIES or the material in LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT. How does the sort of extra freedom he has influence your work on the main titles?*

DENNY: Not very much at all. He's doing different things. I'm in charge of the Batman mythos. He's in charge of everything else. The deal we have, which we haven't talked about very much, is that when I write a story for LEGENDS, it's in the continuity. That's been the deal from the very beginning. That is, in fact, why I don't edit LEGENDS. It allows me to occasionally write for it. I haven't taken very much advantage of that privilege, but I wouldn't want to see it go away, because every once in awhile I do

continuity on it than I ever thought I'd have to deal with."

feel like writing a Batman story and that's my venue for doing it. So, if it's got my name on it, it's part of continuity. If it doesn't, it's a legend of Batman, just like the title says.

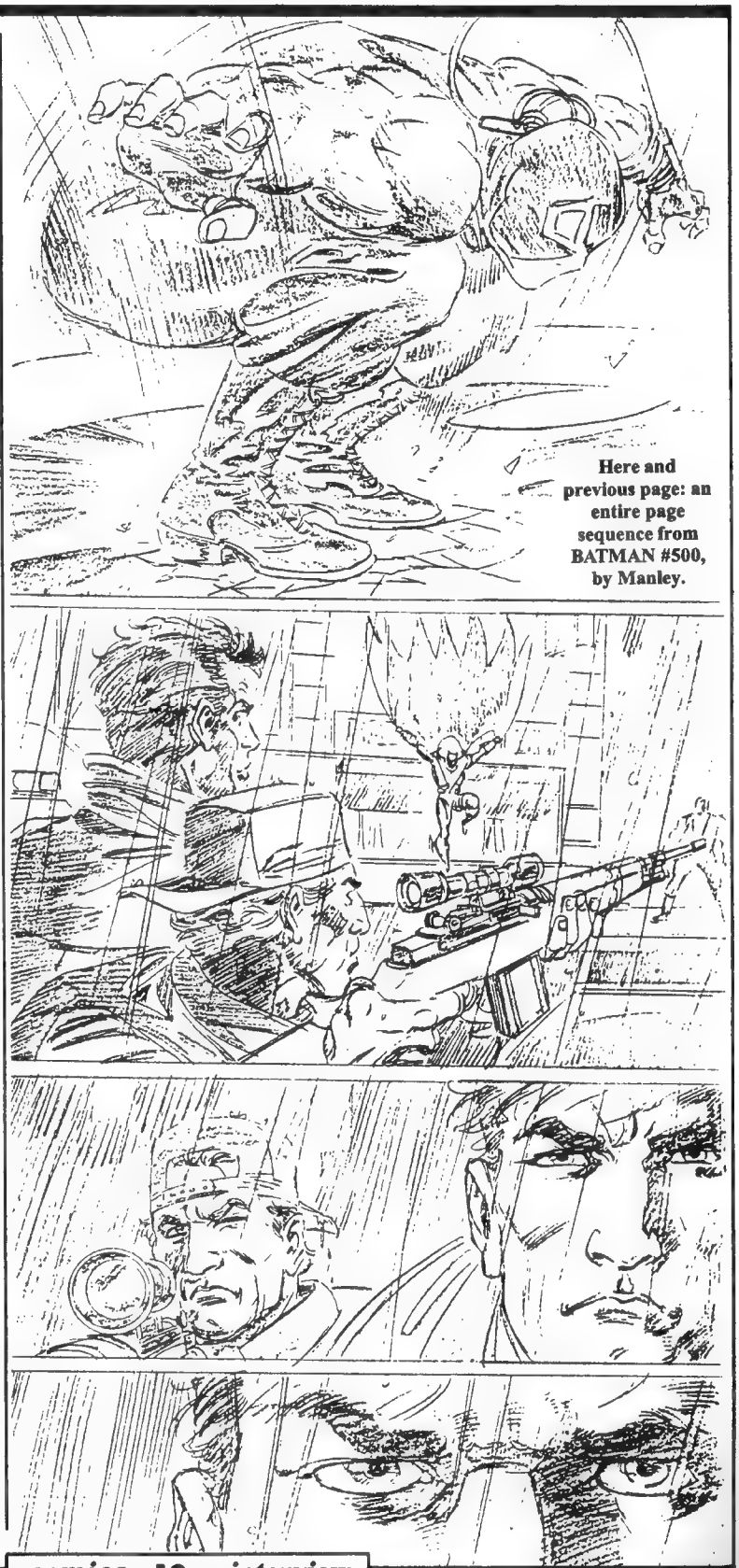
MARK: *Such as LEGENDS #50, the revised origin of the Joker?*

DENNY: It's not a revised origin, it's an augmented origin. This is a story we haven't told before. It's Joker: Year One, in effect. It's what **Mark Gruenwald** calls a continuity implant. The classic example of that is Stick's story in DAREDEVIL that **Frank Miller** did. It doesn't contradict anything that **Stan Lee** and either **Wally Wood** or **Bill Everett** did originally, but it augments it, it supplements it, it fleshes it out. So, I did my homework. I was careful not to contradict anything that we know about the Joker. In fact, the story, while I will stipulate that it's completely independent and self contained, reads off of THE KILLING JOKE. I would like to believe that you don't have to read THE KILLING JOKE to completely understand this, but if you have read THE KILLING JOKE, you'll see that it's all of a piece.

MARK: *There are a number of spin-offs coming from "Knightfall" and the Batman titles now. It seems like everyone in Gotham City is being spotlighted. Catwoman and Robin are due for their own series. The Huntress is supposed to get a mini-series. How much continuity and congruency is there going to be among all of these titles?*

DENNY: They will be part of the same continuity. Specifically, CATWOMAN reads off BATMAN #499, though, again, you don't have to read BATMAN #499 to completely understand the story. ROBIN comes out of BATMAN #501. We're actually working out of a tight continuity. I have in front of me a computer screen with more continuity on it than I ever thought I'd have to deal with in my life. I don't do tight continuity in that when we sit down two or three times a year with the creative people, we don't plot point-for-point the story incidents. We know generally who the villains will be, especially if they're big, popular villains. But, we're more aware of who our cast of characters will be, where they'll be emotionally, physically, psychologically.

In the old days, if Bruce Wayne had broken his back in issue #97, by issue #99 he might be up, doing business as usual. Or, if he broke his back in one Bat-title, that wouldn't be reflected in another. What we try and do is create a sort of life for these characters that is consistent and logical. What I try and do



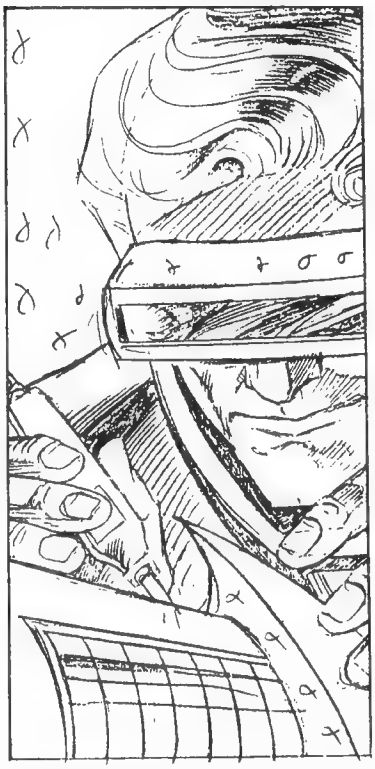
Here and previous page: an entire page sequence from BATMAN #500, by Manley.

"I've adopted what I think of as a mosaic approach."

as an editor is leave it loose enough so that my creative people don't feel that everything is plotted out for them ahead of time, and especially leave it loose enough for somebody to have a better idea. Sometimes in the act of writing a story, that process will generate other ideas. If they're good, we want to be able to accommodate them. We don't want to be bound in by something we thought of six months earlier, that if **Doug Moench** has a terrific idea, we can't find a place for it. At the end of the year, it should all make sense. I think it has for the past several years. I've adopted what I think of as a mosaic approach. It may not be that BATMAN this month opens 15 seconds after the end of DETECTIVE but nothing contradicts anything else. And, at the end of the year, it's possible to assemble a timeline and show that everything had its place and everything happened logically and nothing contradicted anything else. For "Knightfall" and "Knightquest," we're actually getting tighter than that. It'll be much less a mosaic and much more a linear story arc.

MARK: *How will Gotham and the Batman supporting cast react to a new Batman, especially one that's possibly so different?*

DENNY: That's one of the things that's going to be interesting. Some people react positively. Some people react negatively. Some people will think, "Gee, he's finally learned to do his job." Other people will be horrified. That's one of the things we're going to play with, the modern idea of hero. Who's a hero? A **Schwarzeneggar** character or Sherlock Holmes?



Panels 2 and 4 by Graham Nolan, from DETECTIVE COMICS #667.

Who's a greater hero? Is it possible to quantify that? Is that a question that should even be asked?

MARK: *What about Bruce Wayne?*

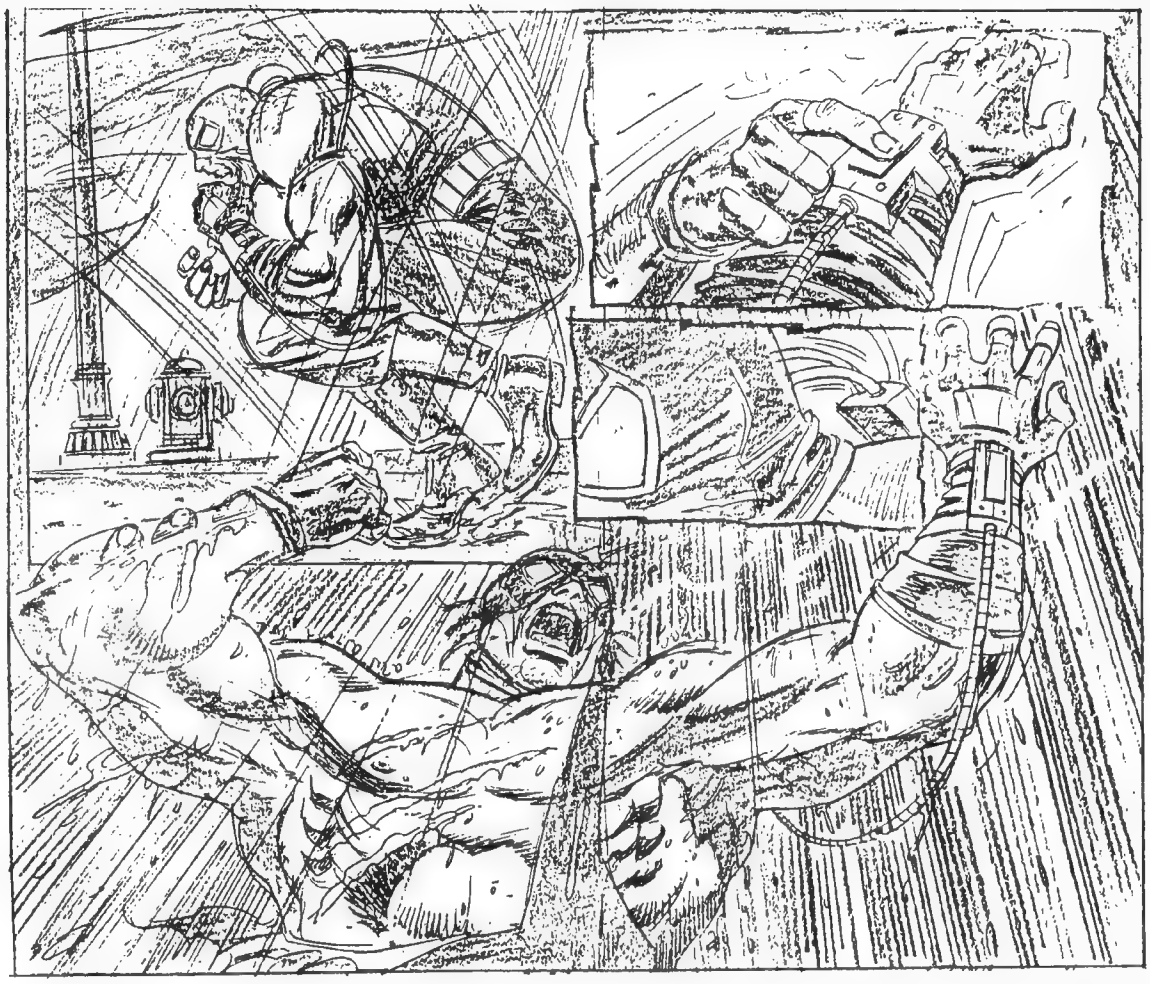
DENNY: A different kind of story dynamic. That will be a story of a man's extreme intelligence and a great number of acquired skills doing something that he feels he must do, but at the same time coping with a terrible setback in his life. I would like to think that that's another look at the idea of hero. Heroes, by my lights, are not necessarily guys who can crash through windows. And, they're emphatically not guys whose main claim to heroism is the ability to commit wholesale slaughter. The bravest people I know are people whose lives are such that it's an effort for them to get out of bed in the morning, yet they go ahead and live their lives. That's a quiet, but deeper, sort of heroism. It requires more commitment, more courage, because adrenalin doesn't help in that at all. You have to simply be determined to do it. So, that's the kind of heroism we'll be looking at in the Bruce Wayne story.

MARK: *It seems everyone these days has their own opinion of why Bruce Wayne has been Batman. What do you think motivates him psychologically?*

DENNY: I don't think it's any great secret. There was a trauma, a big horrible trauma that affected his particular personality more deeply and permanently than it might affect his twin brother, for ex-

It seemed like the manly thing to do, so . . . here's another full-pager with pencils and inks by Mike Manley.

"Five hundred issues. That's been done only twice before,



ample, if he'd had one. That trauma governed his life for a number of years. There came a point, though, at which he made an existential decision. By the time he had reached that degree of self-awareness, he'd acquired a number of skills. He was also gifted genetically. He was born smart and strong. So, he made a decision. "I can do this thing. I'm uniquely qualified in the world to do this thing. And, it's a thing that's worth doing. So, I am choosing to allow my childhood to continue to shape my life." The implication is that, at some point in the future, he might make another choice. That's the difference between crazy and driven. Driven, yes. Crazy, no. A psychopath wouldn't have that degree of self-awareness. There would be no choice. He would be acting out of pure compulsion. Again, I would have trouble calling such a person a hero, no matter what extravagant things he did. There has to be that component of awareness, I think, in anybody that's a real hero. I don't know what my predecessors thought about these things, but we've sort of built that into Batman for the last eight years. Again, I don't think these questions ever occurred to anybody before ten years ago. The good guys were the ones in the suits who did the good stuff and nobody really thought about it much beyond that.

MARK: *Why the suit as opposed to politics or joining the FBI or some other force?*

DENNY: I answered the FBI question in an origin story I did for SECRET ORIGINS. He tried it and decided he'd be spending more time filling out forms than catching criminals, and that's not what he thought he should do. As for the other part, why does anybody choose anything? There are two ways to answer that. One is outside the story and one is inside the story. The inside the story answer involves the way the events of his life shaped him. It's a thing he can do; he thinks it's worth doing. It probably engages the creative part of his nature, whereas the detective work engages the analytic part. Why do twins end up, one an accountant and one a Greenwich Village bohemian, with exactly the same upbringing? My two daughters were born 11 months apart. One's 28 and one's 27. Very, very different young women. Both admirable in their own way but very different with precisely identical upbringing. I don't know if you know anything about chaos theory. It's part of JURASSIC PARK. I'm in the process of finishing reading a book which I'm not understanding a whole lot of. But a tiny, little thing that is too small to be noticed, given time, can have a huge effect. So, Batman has chosen to do this particular thing because something happened, some set of circumstances aimed him in this direction, and at some point he makes a conscious choice to continue in that direction. The other answer, the one that's outside the story, I tried to explore in a story called "Shaman," where, in every mythological tradition that I know about, characters are marked as special by their garb, particu-

that a comic has gone 500 issues of continuous publication."

larly by masks, but to some degree by other garb. And, I think that's what superheroes are: That idea done in a modern sensibility. It's an idea you see all around. Priests when they're saying Mass wear special clothing. Cops. Any kind of uniform has that idea. While the person may be ordinary, the function they serve is not ordinary. It's greater than normal humanity. The garb is a way of externalizing that.

MARK: *Moving along, speculators and gimmicks seem to garner great attention nowadays. How has this affected you and Batman?*

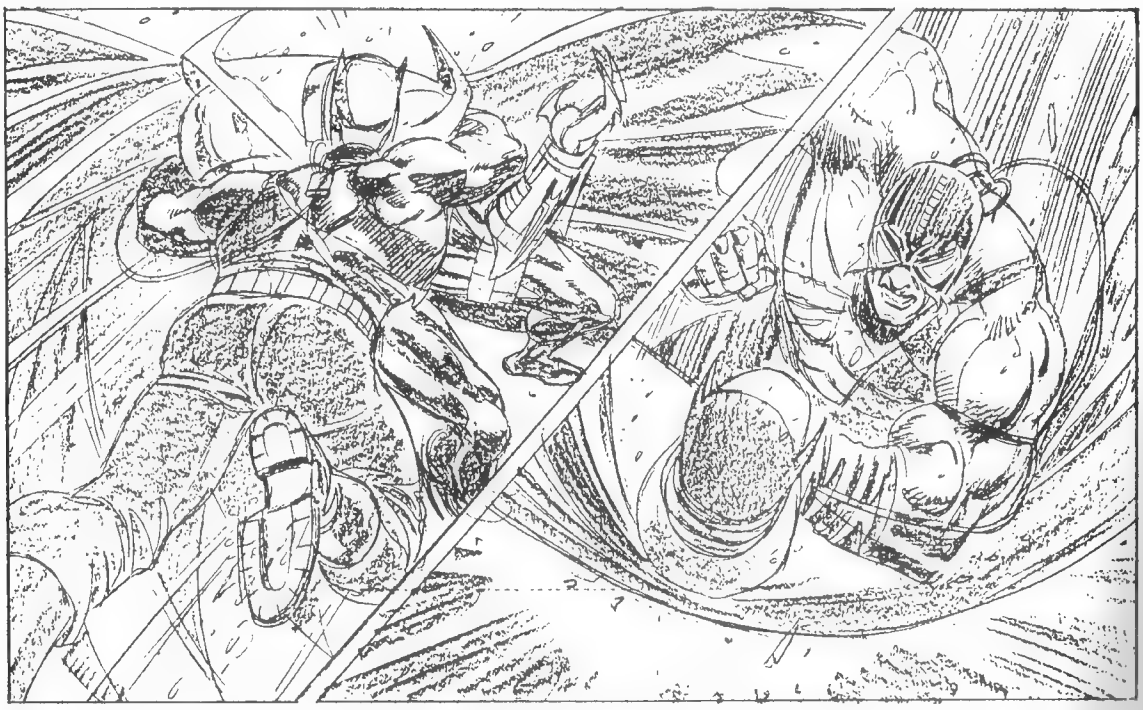
DENNY: I generally don't think of them. Someone else thinks of them. I get together with the cover editor and art director, and we find a way to make them work. DC as a whole, but this office in particular, tends not to be indiscriminate. We only use them on books we feel the content is worthy of special attention. On a Batman book, that will usually mean that something inside is special. We want to commemorate it or call people's attention to it. But, we've never used a cover enhancement for its own sake. Please God we never will. BATMAN #500 has a couple of cover enhancements. Not only is it important to the current storyline, but it's five hundred issues of something. That's been done only twice before, that any periodical has gone 500 issues of continuous publication. It's an extraordinary achievement — worthy, I think, of something on the cover. I don't understand speculators, and I don't understand the collector's mentality. I'm not a collector. I don't have a complete collection of my own stuff, much less anything else. That's just completely alien to me. **Doug Moench** and I were talking earlier about what was a practice when we were kids of trading comics. It was the antithesis of putting them in a plastic bag and sticking them on a shelf. You would load up your little wagon, literally, and go up and down the block to four or five kids who you knew were comics readers. At the end of an afternoon, you'd have 30 new comics to read. You could perpetuate this for several months before every kid that was in the group had read everything, and then somebody would have to buy some new ones. Doug said that he used to do that and then eventually trade back for his favorites. He said they came back in pretty shabby condition because, by that time, seven kids had read them. But, he had his cake and ate it that way, got the full value for trading them and eventually acquired them for his special collection of comics. I'm not a collector of anything. I feel uncomfortable owning things. I have to own a car. So, I'm not able to speak to that. I'm not putting people down at all. On the contrary, I think it's a great hobby. It's just not something I have anything to do with.

MARK: *On a related note, this has been dubbed, "The Summer of Glut." Do you see a crash or implosion forthcoming?*

DENNY: It's hard for me to believe that everybody will survive everything that's out there. I've talked to a number of retailers over the past few weeks. They're in a terrible bind. Assuming they have money, and many of them don't have that in sufficient quantities, they don't have room to put everything out. So, they're having to be very selective. It seems to me fairly obvious what books and what lines of books will not get very well displayed. There are a bunch of new superhero lines starting up this summer, and a lot of other stuff. For comics readers, I think it's a glorious time because there's so much available, literally a comic book for every taste. But, I don't know that every company is going to be able to survive this. I'm very glad I'm not a comics retailer this summer. I think they have an almost impossible situation.

MARK: *Is there fear that some of the Batman titles will be lost in the sea?*

DENNY: No. We're at a high point currently. Our sales figures are much higher than I had any reason to expect



These two pages, page 40 of BATMAN #500 by Mike M. You're not going to see pencils like this anywhere else, folks!

"I have one of the most interesting jobs in publishing."

Two panels from DETECTIVE 667 — pencils by Nolan.

they'd be. No, I'm not a bit worried about that.

MARK: *Is there anything in comics that you haven't done that you'd still like to?*

DENNY: Sure, I'd like to write funny animals. I'd like to write a comic strip. It's not inconceivable that I'd get a crack at funny animals. Comic strips seem to be very much a dying breed. I'd actually agreed to do DALLAS while I was still working for Marvel. That had to be more than eight years ago. A medical reason popped up, and a doctor said, "Don't increase your workload for six months." So, I didn't. By the time I got clear of that problem, the DALLAS opportunity had gone away. But, just to see if I could do it . . . I wouldn't expect that it would be a very profitable thing, but it would be an interesting kind of challenge. It would be an exercise in craftsmanship. Apart from that, I pretty much have accomplished everything I've set out to accomplish. I've actually gone a bit further than I ever anticipated going, both as a writer and editor. I've no reason to be dissatisfied with the way my professional life has gone at all, especially since I've never thought of myself as having a career. That word seems very alien when applied to me. I stumbled into writing comics 28 years ago, and I stumbled from month-to-month getting assignments. Occasionally, assignments would lead to other things like being offered editorial positions. I've never had a game plan. Again, doing one thing at a time and making up my life as I went along. Suddenly, it's 28 years later and I haven't been in the newspaper business for almost three decades. I guess I'm not in that business anymore. But I have one of the most interesting jobs in publishing, and I've had a life that's far more interesting that anything I could have anticipated.

MARK: *What do you see for yourself, then, in the next ten years?*

DENNY: I don't know. Ask me in a year. I'm going to get past the current workload, which is pretty heavy, and then take stock and see if I can figure it out from there.

MARK: *What's it like being in the center of this mass media attention now?*

DENNY: It's stressful. Last Monday, I woke up and put on my clothes, thinking, "Oh, damn! I have to be on television today. I have to wear a better shirt than this." Suddenly I realized, "I'm complaining?" People kill to be on television and I'm complaining because I have to change shirts and make sure my hair is combed properly. It's fun talking to reporters. It has been fun being on television. One of the TV interviews I gave this time was an interview by an extraordinarily bright, intelligent, thoughtful woman who had done her homework, so it was a pleasure talking to her. At other times, as per my radio show yesterday, it can be an awful chore that you have to get through. I have done so much of it now that it's not as much fun as it once was. There are times when it's not fun at all. The times when it is fun, it's not that I'm going on radio or television per se, I'm talking to a bright, interested person . . . and there happens to be a microphone present. Television, I never watch the things unless I see them by accident. My wife tapes them, so if I ever feel masochistic and want to really depress myself, I could watch all of them

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Book BATMAN Issue # 500 pg # 31

Mike Manley's 31st pencil page for BATMAN #500.

"Comics have always been a funhouse mirror

in one day. But I hate the way I look on television, so I tend to avoid suffering that particular way.

MARK: *You're aware that you're representing not just yourself and the Batman titles but actually the whole comics community?*

DENNY: Yes, to some degree. That's a pretty heavy load to carry, especially

The all-new wrap-around cover for the BATMAN: SWORD OF AZRAEL collected soft-cover — re-teaming Quesada and Nowlan.

reflection of what's going on in the world."

since you want to be honest. I don't want ever to go on the air and do hype. If you ask a question I can't answer, I'll say I can't answer that. Except with discrete omissions here and there, you try to be pretty up front about it. I'm not much of a salesman. I can't go on in front of any kind of audience and just do hype. I wish I could. It would probably make my life a lot easier.

MARK: *Will the Question ever return?*

DENNY: Yes, as soon as I'm done writing all the Batman stuff I have to write, I'm going to do a 56-page Question story. **Archie Goodwin** has the cover already, and all I have to do is think up a plot. There are a lot of ways we could go with it. I think we basically told the story that we've set out to tell over the 36 issues. I have to decide — it's now three years later — where Sage would logically be. Has he solved that problem which was always the unspoken part of the story: Who am I? That's really what it was about. Has he become a pacifist? Has he become more violent? Do I want to do a martial arts story, which are fun to do once in a while? Do I want to do an allegory? The thing about writing the Question is that I have far more freedom than I usually do when working for a large audience. You have almost complete freedom if you are going to write a short story, but then you take your chances that anybody will ever read it. The Question affords about as much freedom as I ever expect to get, working in any commercial medium. I have six Batman stories to write. Then, I'd like to take a month and really try and do a good job on the next Question. It'll probably be out within a year.

MARK: *To wrap this up, what do you foresee for the Batman in the next millennium?*

DENNY: All I can say is that I think I understand the essence of the character. That won't change. I would like to believe that everything else will continue to evolve. That's like asking me where things are going to be in general in ten years. Comics have always been a funhouse mirror reflection of what's going on in the world. There are a lot of reasons for that. I don't think there's anything particularly mysterious about it. I think if you take a lot of comics against some sort of historical outline, you'll see that comics have reflected the concerns of their audience. What will those concerns be like in ten years? I'm not real optimistic about the way the world's going. And, I don't think many people are, either, which explains the popularity of dark characters. I'd certainly like to be proven wrong. If I had my druthers, in ten years Batman would be a lot brighter and cheerier than he is now, because I think that would mean the world had become a more optimistic place. We'll see.

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"When I first came to Hollywood I was under contract."

Left to right: Kirk Alyn (Clark Kent), Noel Neill (Lois Lane) — both of whom had cameos in SUPERMAN (1978), and Lyle (playing Lex Luthor in the serial ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN).

On those thrilling days of yesteryear, Lyle Talbot fought to destroy the Man of Tomorrow, assisted the Dynamic Duo and gazed in grateful awe at the departing figure of the masked man on his great white horse.

Appearing in nearly 200 films — some of Hollywood's best and, by his own wry admission, some of its worst —the assiduous actor was a veritable vertebra in the backbone of a Hollywood which has long since passed into legend. He was, in fact, "Mr. Hollywood" — a tag which stuck after a columnist discovered his grandmother's prophetic maiden name. Talbot and his wife, Margaret, were the parents of four, three of whom have gone on to make their own marks in the media. Stephen is a Peabody Award-winning filmmaker whose most recent project is a documentary on American social historian and novelist John Dos Passos. David is the editor of the Hearst Sunday magazine IMAGE in San Francisco. Cynthia is a Seattle physician, and Margaret is editor of the academic journal LINGUA FRANCA. Margaret, the youngest daughter, was born, rather abruptly, while her father was touring with Hollywood's Blondie, Penny Singleton, in that perennial play about postponed parenthood, NEVER TOO LATE. A widower for three years, the 90-year-old Talbot now lives in San Francisco, where he recently reminisced about his roles as filmdom's first Lex Luthor (in ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN, 1950) and initial Commissioner Gordon (in BATMAN AND ROBIN, 1949)...

DAN HAGEN: *How did you land the roles in those Columbia serials, the BATMAN and SUPERMAN things?*

LYLE TALBOT: Well, when I first came to Hollywood I was under contract. I was signed by Warner Bros. In those early, beginning days of talkies, most every actor in Hollywood was under contract because the studios wanted to protect themselves on having enough actors to make films. Each studio in those days had, oh, easily 75 actors under contract who just worked at that studio. They would loan you out to another studio or make a trade for you. You had no control over that in your contract. The contracts were prior to the Screen Actors Guild. In each option period, you got a raise in salary and if the studio wanted to keep you, they would take up your option at the raise. And if they didn't want you, they could refuse to give you the raise and then you would be out. That's the way it operated in those days.

So each studio had its roster of actors, and I happened to be at Warners — even though in the theater I had played light

LYLE TALBOT

Clark Kent, Lex Luthor, Lois Lane, Superman, Batman & Robin — characters all ©1992 DC Comics, Inc.

"I've been in some golden turkeys, that's for sure."

parts. I was what was called a light comedian. I did farces and comedies and I was very good at that sort of thing.

DAN: *The Noel Coward kind of thing?*

LYLE: Exactly, exactly. Then at my test, the famous director **Bill Wellman,** who was known as **Wild Bill Wellman,** saw the test and said, "Oh, that's the guy I want for a part in LOVE IS A RACKET," which was my first movie. The character was patterned after an actual gangster who didn't look like one. He frequented Sardi's in New York. He knew a lot of actors.

So when they started casting their next picture, they'd say, "Oh, Talbot, yeah." And Warners was in the business those days of making a lot of gangster things like LITTLE CAESAR and all that stuff. So I was playing gangsters there, but then when they would loan me out, like to Columbia, I'd go over there and I'd do a light comedy, for example with **Carole Lombard** on NO MORE ORCHIDS. I did one picture over there that did win an Oscar. It was a picture with beautiful music. It was called ONE NIGHT OF LOVE . . .

DAN: *I saw that you were in SUNRISE AT CAMPOBELLO, too.*

LYLE: Yeah, that was my last movie. I had gotten into television early. I thought this new medium of television, which a lot of people scoffed at and laughed about . . . I remember I was on the board of directors of the Guild at that time. Incidentally, of the original 25 members, I'm number 21. They've died, many of them years ago, the original ones.

DAN: *So you were one of the founders of SAG?*

LYLE: I was a founder of the Screen Actors Guild, and I took a lot of flak from the studio because we were trying to organize. They didn't think we should have a union, you know, because in the silent era they didn't have one. Those of us who came out in that era — like **Bogart** and **Spencer Tracy** and **Pat O'Brien** and **Bette Davis** and all the ones that I came with — we were from the theater and of course we had the Actors Equity, you know. So we believed actors should be unionized to protect themselves. I'm proud of my activity at the Guild. We've got, today, 65,000 paid-up members! That's paid up, that means they can go to work if they can find a job. And of course, most of them can't, you know. Even in the older days, but today particularly, they've got to find other jobs, unless they've got money.

DAN: *And how did you find the jobs in the serials?*

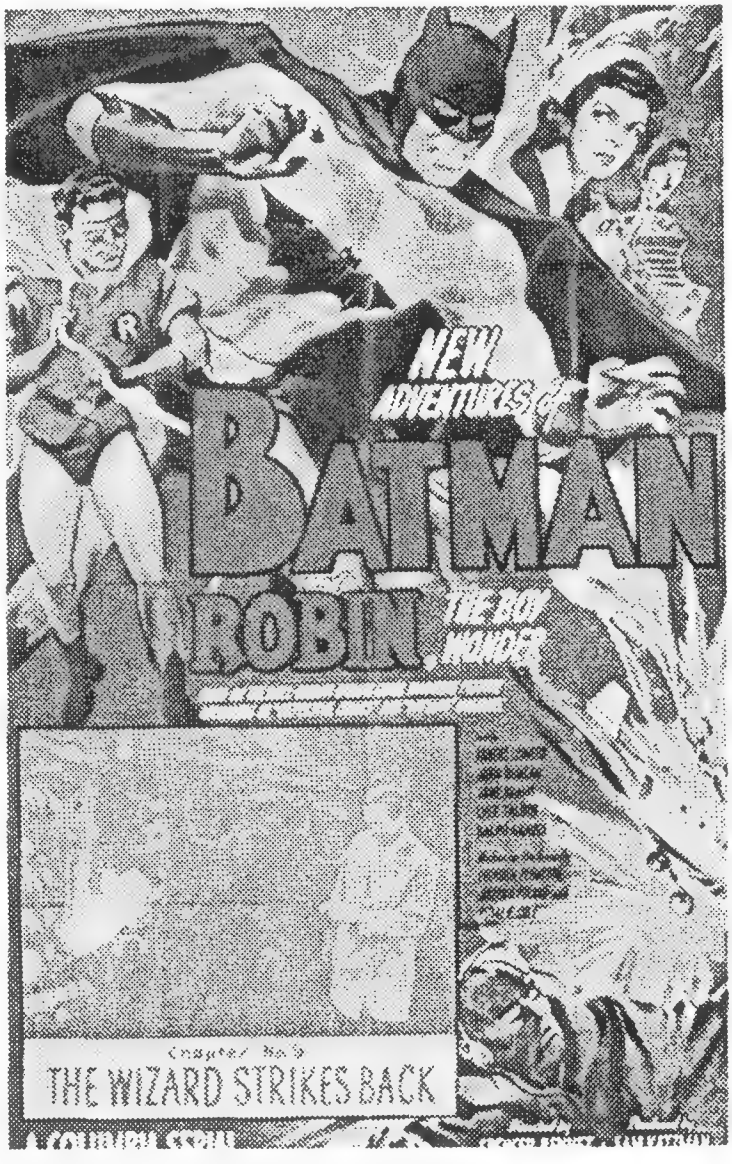
LYLE: After I started freelancing, I took a lot of jobs. I always believed in working, so I've been in some golden turkeys, that's for sure — PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE, which has become a collector's item.

DAN: *Were you in that? Omigod.*

LYLE: Oh, yes, that's my claim to fame! **Eddie Wood,** who made the picture, was a little guy. He was an assistant director, and he used to come up to me on the set and say, "Oh, you're one of my favorite actors. I'm going to make a movie someday and I want you to be in it." You know, what do you say? You don't say, "Well, get away from me, you . . ." I said, "Well, sure, Eddie, call me." Well, some years later, that happened. He did the same thing with **Bela Lugosi,** who was in it, and several others, and he made this stinker which he wrote. And what they used for a space thing was a garbage can lid. *(Laughter.)*

So anyway, my agent got me this job with **Sam Katzman,** who was the famous maker of all those serials, which were mostly popular during the silent era. But they did carry over. Of course, he did SUPERMAN, the first one of that. I was in the second one, and that's when they

Lobby card from one of the many chapters of BATMAN & ROBIN (Mr. Talbot played Commissioner Gordon).



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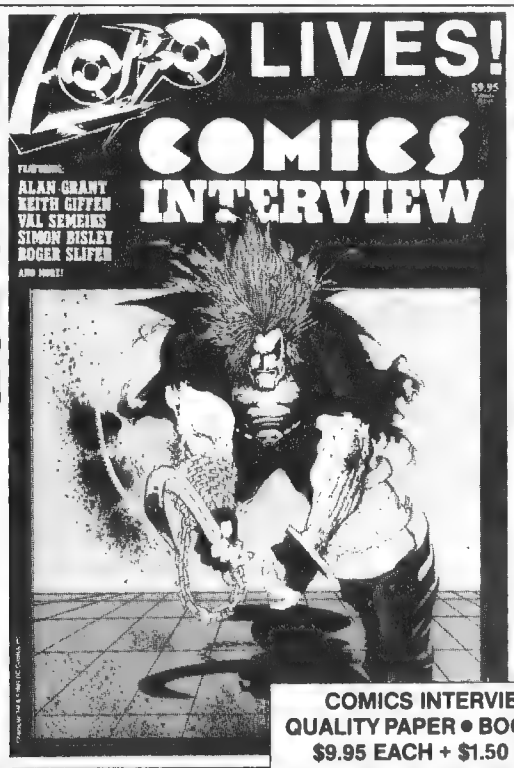

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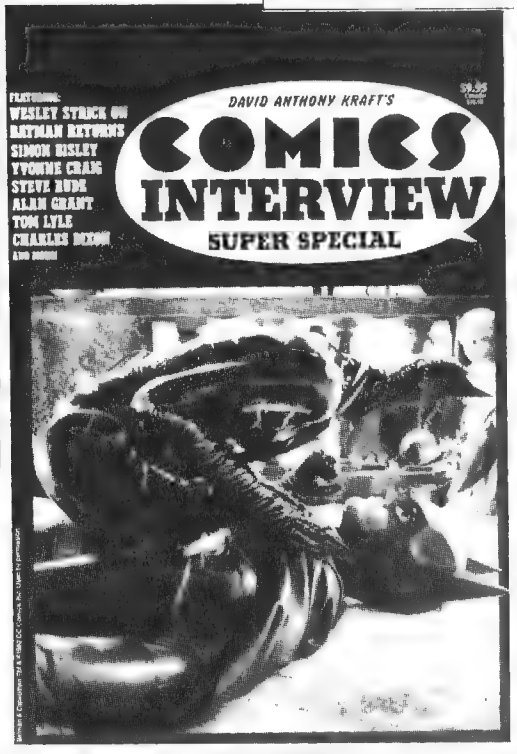

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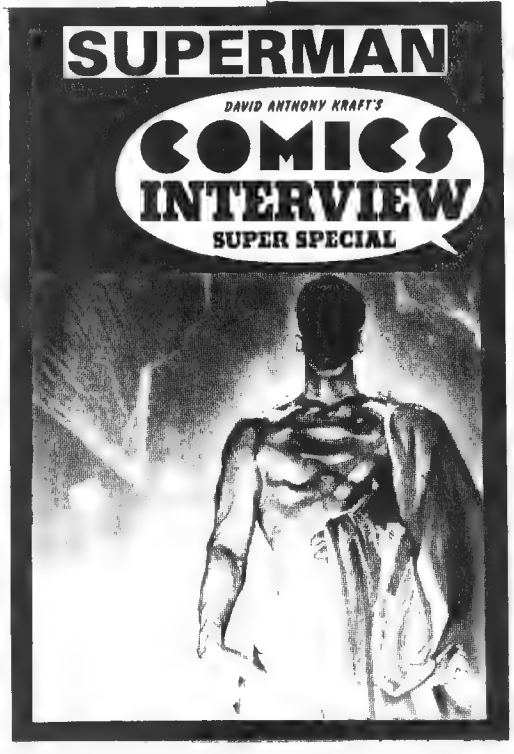

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"The agreement was to pay me an extra four weeks

introduced Luthor, the Atom Man. He played both characters.

DAN: *Luthor was pretending to be reformed, as I recall.*

LYLE: That was the idea, yes. And **Kirk Alyn,** of course, is a dear old friend of mine. The first way we got interested in each other was that I'm a kind of a cook. I cook some things pretty well that I remembered from my early days. And he was into stuff like that. He's Hungarian, so he gave me a great recipe for stuffed cabbage.

DAN: *Superman and Luthor exchanging recipes, that's great.*

LYLE: We became very good friends, and **Katzman** liked me. I tell you, that was a job going through that. My makeup man had to develop a scalp thing.

DAN: *I was going to ask you about that bald cap. It looked pretty good.*

LYLE: It was one of the first times that it had been used, and it was a plastic thing. First of all, they did have to trim my hair a little short, particularly around the neck and everything. The agreement was that he was going to pay me an extra four weeks after the thing was over while my hair grew back. And then this plastic cap, it was very thin to begin with. But in order to make it really sort of melt into the skin, they would use a kind of a thing called collodian. Women use it to remove old nail polish. He would rub that with the cloth, and it would sort of melt this thin plastic to begin with, so that makeup would cover it without showing a ridge. But because your scalp has to breath, otherwise something could conceivably happen to your hair, it had to be left open — that is, not sealed — over my ears. Of course, I wore that all day. It took an hour to put it on, and then to remove it, the same thing.

Well, it was fine for about a week, but then, with this thing on every day at least five days a week, my skin was beginning to get very raw there. I was some time really recovering from that, getting my skin back to normal. But I must say, show biz was always fun to me. I loved it and the people I worked with.

DAN: *What about the BATMAN serial?*

LYLE: In that, of course, I played the chief of police.

DAN: *Right. Commissioner Gordon. I remember you had a thing sort of like a TV set that was the Bat Signal, which you would roll up to the window and summon Batman by flashing the beam in the sky.*

LYLE: Oh, yes, I do remember that. Little **Johnny Duncan,** who played Robin, was only about 20 then. We became quite good friends. He had been a jockey at one time; he was a little guy. He was in pictures for a while, and I hadn't seen him for years, didn't know if he was still around. You know, you had friends, but not necessarily that you saw all the time.

Anyway, I went to this film festival in Knoxville, Tennesee, two years ago. One of my closest friends happens to live down in Santa Cruz, **Walter Reed.** Walter used to be at RKO. He did those things with **Lupe Velez** when she was known as the Mexican Spitfire, you know. He had gone to one of these things, and he said, "Lyle, would you like to go back there? They'd love to have you." "Well," I said, "Isn't it mostly westerns?" He said, "Yeah, but of course they're into serials, too." And I said, "Well, that's fine, sure." And I saw a lot of old friends of mine, **George Montgomery,** and **Johnny Duncan** was there. He was about 60-something, and of course I was in my late 80s.

Another still from ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN — Kirk displays his super strength.

after the thing was over while my hair grew back."

DAN: *And Kirk Alyn was there, too, you'd mentioned.*

LYLE: Kirk was there, yes, and I hadn't seen Kirk in a long time. You know, it was a strange thing, because he was a good actor, really, but he got so identified with Superman. And you know, they weren't going to make a lot of them, and they didn't. And nobody else would give him a job! Somebody said to him, "Look, why don't you do this thing of appearing at supermarkets and stuff," and for a while he did that, and did quite well because they were paying big for those things. I don't know, finally, what Kirk actually did do, but I know he had a tough time.

DAN: *That's happened a lot. The same thing happened to Adam West with Batman, for example. And Christopher Reeve was worried about it, too, I know.*

LYLE: Yes, sometimes they just don't think you can do anything else. And it isn't the audience so much as what the producers think. It used to kill me. **Harry Warner** was the eldest of the Warners in the time I was at Warners. Prior to that, when they wanted to make talkies, Sam was the one who found the guy that had developed the Vitagraph, which was the first one, you know. And Harry said, "Sam, come on, leave it alone. Who wants to hear actors talk?" *(Laughter.)* Well, anyway, that's history.

DAN: *Those serials, pretty fast-paced, long days?*

LYLE: Yes. In those days, too, we were still on the six-day thing. We didn't get the five-day thing until the Guild came in. And I'm telling you, they were long weeks. Saturdays, you could always depend on working until midnight, because the argument was, "What do you want? You've got Sunday off!"

DAN: *Oh, great. We were talking earlier, too, about the approach to the roles. In the serials, you weren't playing it campy at all but right down the line.*

LYLE: Oh, no, no. You played them for real. I mean, you didn't kid Superman. they were truer to it than the later . . .

DAN: *Not like the BATMAN TV show?*

LYLE: No, no, no, no. And we felt that about it, you know. This as a serious drama we were doing. Nobody kidded it at all. You had a sense of humor, and you'd laugh about certain things, but our approach was never to kid it. This had to be for real. But they would shoot fast. The directors were guys who knew what they wanted, and they tried to get it in as few takes as possible. And once in a while, one of those takes would get by them that, as actors, we weren't happy with, but it was too late.

John Duncan as Robin, and Robert Lowerey as the screen's original Dark Knight (from BATMAN & ROBIN).

DAN: *I was just looking at part of the SUPERMAN serial the other day, and there you are, saying sternly, "All right then, I'm going to turn the beam on Metropolis, and destroy the city!"* (Laughter.) *You're playing the mad scientist just about absolutely realistically . . .*

LYLE: Oh, hell, I felt I was going to do that. You know, you kind of feel a little important. I felt, "Gosh, I'm pretty tough. I'm pretty menacing."

DAN: *That's great. What I hate is when they make fun of those things, and sort of deliberately undercut the whole project.*

LYLE: I think so, I really do. I think you have to do anything — I don't care whether it's a serial or what it is — for real. I know most of the actors, particularly from the theater — I don't mean to belittle anything else, but in the theater there's a discipline that didn't exist in Hollywood. As a matter of fact, the actors from the theater changed the whole thing and gave it some respect from the performance standpoint — guys like **Tracy.** I did a couple with him, TWENTY THOUSAND YEARS IN SING SING . . . We always wanted to rehearse, and sometimes the director would say, "Let's shoot it." And Spence would say, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Let's run this." The director, depending on who it was, would say, "Well, all right . . ."

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"What the wardrobe dept. delivered you took as authentic."

As mentioned in the interview, "That costume of Robert Lowery's was kind of strange" — indeed it was — and also very effective for its time.

DAN: *In the BATMAN serial, that costume of Robert Lowery's was kind of strange, though, wasn't it?*

LYLE: *(Laughter.)* That thing, yes. Of course, well, whatever the wardrobe department delivered to you, you accepted as having been authentic.

DAN: *He had a very strange-looking cowl there. I'd heard that he was sort of bound up in a corset the whole time.*

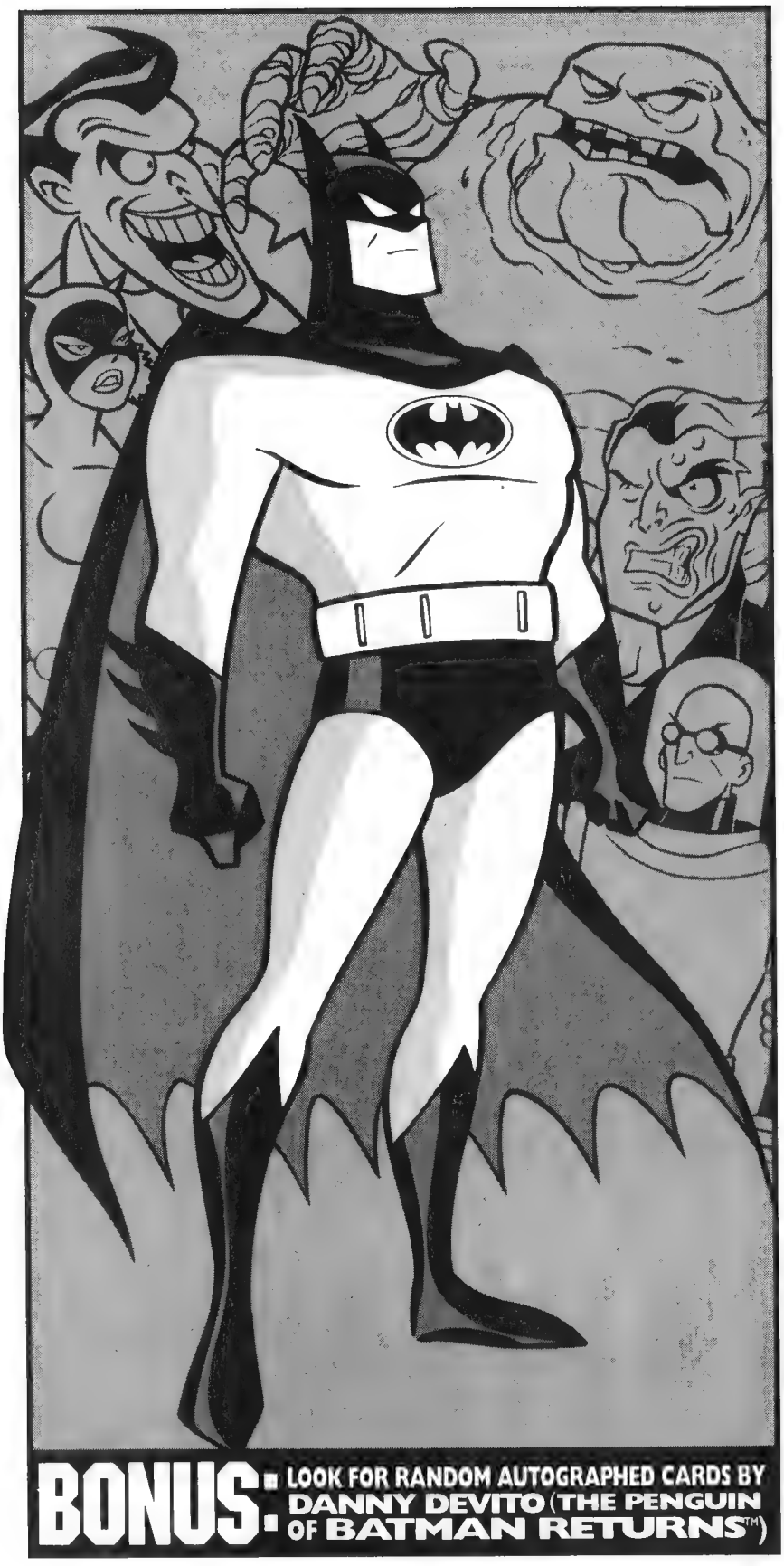
LYLE: He might have been. I don't think I'm aware of that, but it's possible that Bob was. Bob died quite young, you know. He was a nice guy. He just never seemed to get out of that category. Some of us did and some of us didn't, and some of us got out of it and back in it. I was in and out of so many different periods in my lifetime, part of it my fault and part of it just the way things were, you know.

DAN: *Do you have any particular memories of things that happened on the set in those serials?*

LYLE: I remember one thing that was kind of interesting that happened at about that time, and it was looked upon as a great thing for movies. The Polaroid camera had just come out, and Sam's son, who was only about 10 years old, I think, came on the set one day and he had this Polaroid. I'd never seen one before, and it was like magic in those days. It was a great thing for the script girl or man for matching one scene to another. It was their job to check your wardrobe or even your position — if you had something in your hand, smoking or something — so that when you got to that scene maybe two or three days later, she could match it up.

DAN: *Right, continuity. You had no real way to know all that stuff before the Polaroid.*

LYLE: If they took pictures of it, they had to wait and get them developed. The



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"I think I'm a frustrated cartoonist, really."

still men were still working with the camera on the tripod, shooting full-size 8x10s for the stills.

DAN: *One thing I thought was fun about those serials is that, in retrospect, the technology is kind of quaint. In the BATMAN serial, the villain's dreaded device was "remote control." And in ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN, Luthor was running a television operation.*

LYLE: Oh, sure. As a matter of fact, I made a movie at Columbia with **Mary Astor,** a thing called TRAPPED BY TELEVISION. That was made in the '30s, and in it the idea was that this television camera photographs the criminal. And they brought in this thing that you wouldn't believe. This was what the props department thought that a television camera would look like. It was this gigantic thing with a huge lens that was at least as big as a 28-inch screen on a television — that was the lens! It looked like something from outer space, but who was to argue with it?

DAN: (Laughter.) *Yes, it's strange to see things like remote control and television given a sinister spin in those old serials.*

LYLE: Oh, all the dials we had in that one set there! These were just things that they'd gotten from the phone company and bought somewhere. And they just put them on the wall with a lot of lights behind them.

DAN: *And you, as Luthor, would run around and flip them.*

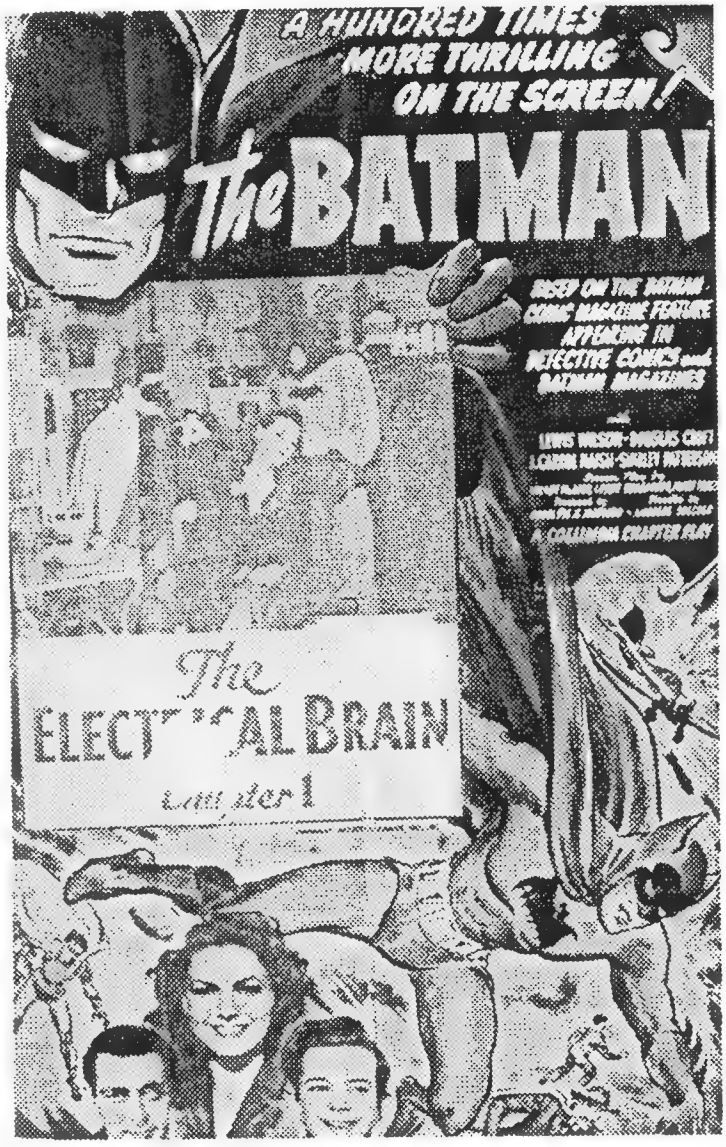
LYLE: *(Laughter.)* Well, listen, any button you pushed would do it. If the stone door had to open or whatever it was, it opened.

DAN: *Were you familiar with those characters at all, Batman and Superman, before you got the jobs?*

LYLE: Well, I think I'm a frustrated cartoonist, really. A very dear friend of mine — and one of my claims to fame is that he wanted to be an actor, and I talked him out of it — was a guy by the name of **Milton Caniff.**

DAN: *Oh! TERRY AND THE PIRATES and STEVE CANYON.*

LYLE: His home was Dayton, Ohio, and he went to school at Ohio State in Columbus. I was playing in a resident theater there in 1930, before I went to Hollywood. And Milton had just graduated from Ohio State, and he'd gotten a job on one of the local papers there. He was not their top cartoonist, their sort of political cartoonist or anything like that. He was just an assistant, and some of the things he did were just to draw up ads and stuff. They never gave him a chance to do anything.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Well, he wanted to be an actor, so he came to interview me and to do some sketches of me — which, incidentally, I have signed by him. They're a treasure. He was a fine artist, beautiful artist. We became friendly. He was a little on the chunky side, and, in those stock companies, because we only had about 12 regular actors in it, we would use local people when the cast was larger than that. Of course, he knew that, and he said, "Lyle, if there is ever a part in some of these, I'd appreciate it." I was the leading man in the company, and I said, "Oh, sure, Milt." I realized he wanted to become an actor.

We'd become friends, he and his wife — he was then married — and one day I said, "Milton, gee, you're such a good artist. You ought to do one of these strip things." At that time, there was TARZAN, GASOLINE ALLEY . . . he said, "Yeah, I've got one." I said, "What's it about?" He said, "Well, it's called TERRY." I said, "What does he do?" and he said, "Well, he's in China." I said, "Well, what do you know about China?" I got interested. He said, "I've done a lot of reading," which he had, we found out later. But the only Chinese he'd ever seen was in a restaurant or a laundry. *(Laughter.)* He'd never been out of Ohio at that time. And I think he was getting about 40 bucks a week or something like that. He wasn't doing too well.

I said, "Look, have you got it?" He

"George Burns and I have the same doctor we

said, "Yeah," so he brings down what would be about a six-month supply of this thing. I said, "Well, this is just wonderful. Why doesn't the paper run it?" He said, "Oh, I don't know. I've tried." By that time, I'd been there and I knew a lot of people in Columbus. When you're in those resident companies, you become a part of the town, you know? I knew the owner of the paper, and I had been invited to his home. I remember one night, it was during Prohibition but we had had some drinks and I was feeling pretty good. So I said, "Look, why don't you start using **Milton Caniff's** TERRY?" He said, "We don't have room for it, Lyle. We've got all these other comics contracted for, and we just don't have the room." I said, "Well, it's a shame."

Ultimately, Milton went to Chicago and sold TERRY AND THE PIRATES to the Chicago Tribune Syndicate, and they ran it.

DAN: *There was some legal trouble over that later, I think.*

LYLE: You know, it's an interesting thing. I knew **George McManus,** who was around Hollywood quite a bit. He drew BRINGING UP FATHER. What happened in those days was that a cartoonist never owned his series. The syndicate owned it. You sold all rights, but you got paid a royalty and for doing them. Well, Milt didn't know, so naturally the Tribune owned control of it. When he decided to do STEVE CANYON, I was in touch then with Milton quite a lot, corresponding back and forth. He then got smart and he was the first guy to own his own, and he owned STEVE CANYON. I have a couple of the strips that he gave me, which he autographed to me.

DAN: *It occurred to me, too, that you did some LONE RANGERS on TV, didn't you?*

LYLE: Yeah. **Clayton Moore** was an old friend of mine. It was before **Wrather** bought them, you know. I did two or three of those.

DAN: *You even got to say the famous line, I believe. "Why, don't you know? That was the Looooone Ranger."*

LYLE: Exactly, exactly.

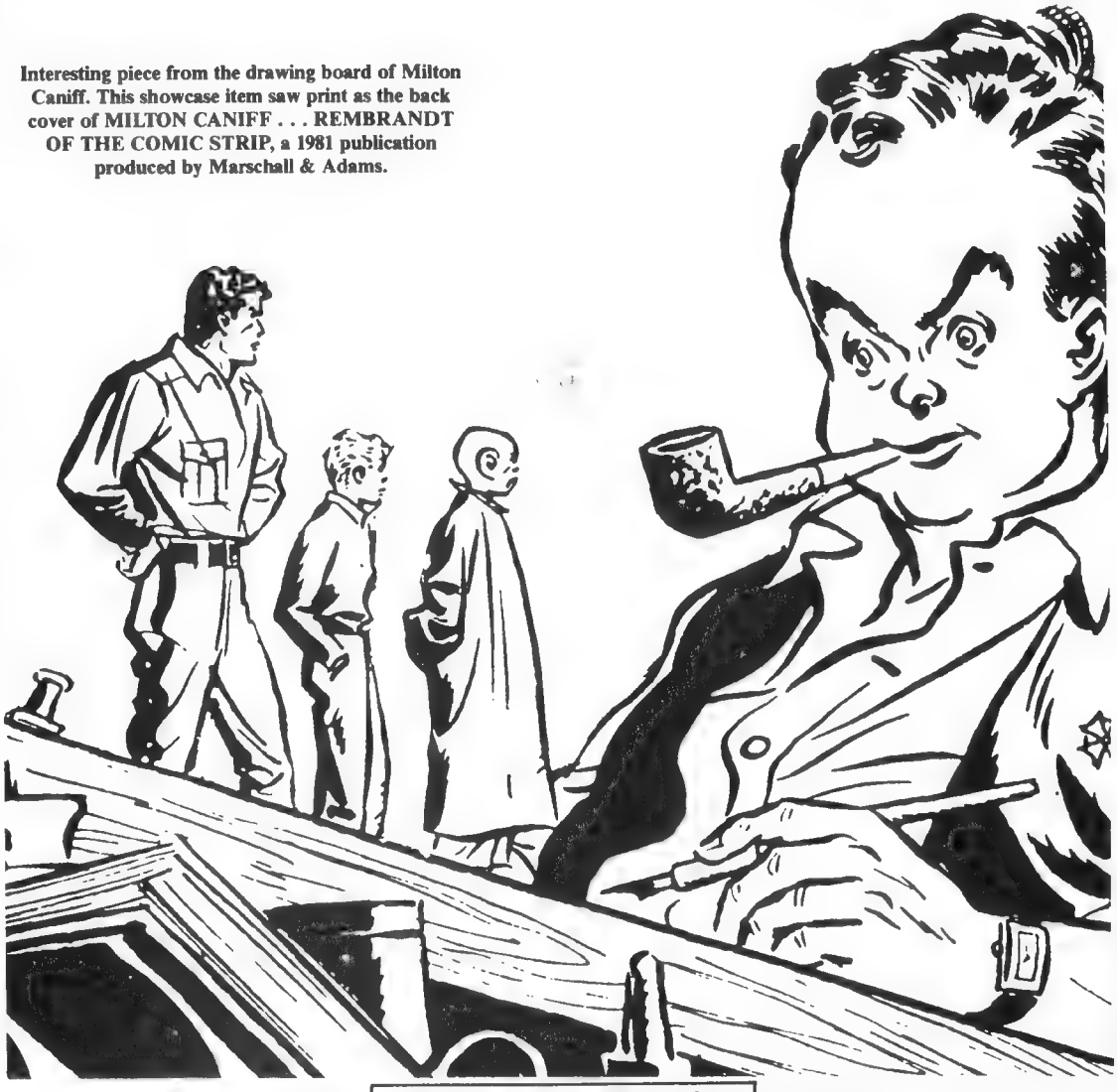
DAN: *So your major series, though, were THE ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET and LOVE THAT BOB?*

LYLE: Yes, and I played **George Burns'** manager in his series, he and Gracie.

DAN: *Do you ever see him these days?*

LYLE: Yes. George and I have the same doctor we used to go to for our prostate.

Interesting piece from the drawing board of Milton Caniff. This showcase item saw print as the back cover of MILTON CANIFF . . . REMBRANDT OF THE COMIC STRIP, a 1981 publication produced by Marschall & Adams.



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used to go to for our prostate. He called me 'kid.'"

(Laughter.) He always called me "kid." About five years ago, I was over to see my doctor. George was there and somebody was with him, of course. There was a big crowd waiting for the elevator. I hadn't seen him in a long time. I was with my wife then, so I kind of weaved through the crowd and said, "Hi, George." He said, "Hi, kid! What are you doing here?" *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *What advice do you give aspiring actors these days?*

LYLE: There just aren't that many jobs around. Some guys are just lucky, they go from one to another. So not only talent is important, but you have to be awful lucky today. I never urged my kids to get in the business. Stephen, my eldest son, worked on the LEAVE IT TO BEAVER series for about five years. He played Gilbert on that, you know, who was always getting Beaver into trouble . . .

DAN: *That was your son who was Gilbert? I didn't know that.*

LYLE: Yeah. It haunted him. After he'd gotten out of prep school in L.A., he wanted to go away to college. Well, he had earned his tuition. He did BEAVER and he did a lot of the LASSIES. As a matter of fact, his claim to fame is he got bit by Lassie. Running across a stream, Lassie got excited and nipped him in the butt. *(Laughter.)* And the studio thought we were going to sue them. But in those days, nobody was suing anybody. But he got nipped. It drew blood.

But anyway, as he went on to college, he went to Wesleyan in Middleton, Connecticut, and it followed him there. He became the leader of his freshman group, and he was against recruiting on campus, because it was about that period. So they had a big blow-up of his picture standing out in front of the administration building. And below it, it says, "Well, I dunno, Beav . . ." *(Laughter.)*

"My father was the one who encouraged me to act."

JOHN DeLANCIE

Q on STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION is a conundrum of a character — and so, it would seem, is the actor who portrays him. After all, it's quite a stretch from acting in TV soap operas to scripting comic books — all the while acting in between. Now, we meet John DeLancie — another of the Shakespearean STAR TREKkers . . .

JIM O'REAR: *How did you decide you wanted to get into acting?*

JOHN deLANCIE: Well, I don't think I really *decided* to get into acting, I had it *thrust* upon me. One of my teachers, a man who I'm still very close to, came into the classroom one day and said, "Why don't you do HENRY V?" So, I started doing HENRY V, I learned HENRY V, and my father saw it and thought that I did pretty well at it, and *he* was the one who encouraged me to be an actor.

JIM: *Is that something you like to do more, the classical stuff? Or are there any certain types of characters that you like? I know you've done a lot of Shakespeare, in training at Juilliard and all.*

JOHN: Well, the classical stuff, as you say, what's enjoyable about it is that it's time-tested and it's very meaty and there's a lot to do, so you raise yourself up to the material. Most new plays, like anything, are not necessarily good, and so very often times it's not as fulfilling an experience. I've been in a lot of new plays which have been very good as well, but certainly *most* of the time if you're doing a classical piece you know you're going to have a run for your money.

JIM: *Do you enjoy stage or film better?*

JOHN: I do them both, and I do them for different reasons, and I do them at different times. They give me different things. I go to the theater as an opportunity to work out, to exercise, to grow. I like films because it gives me an opportunity to support my family. *(Laughter.)* And also to be in much more of the commercial end of the business.

JIM: *What are some of the most recent plays that you've done?*

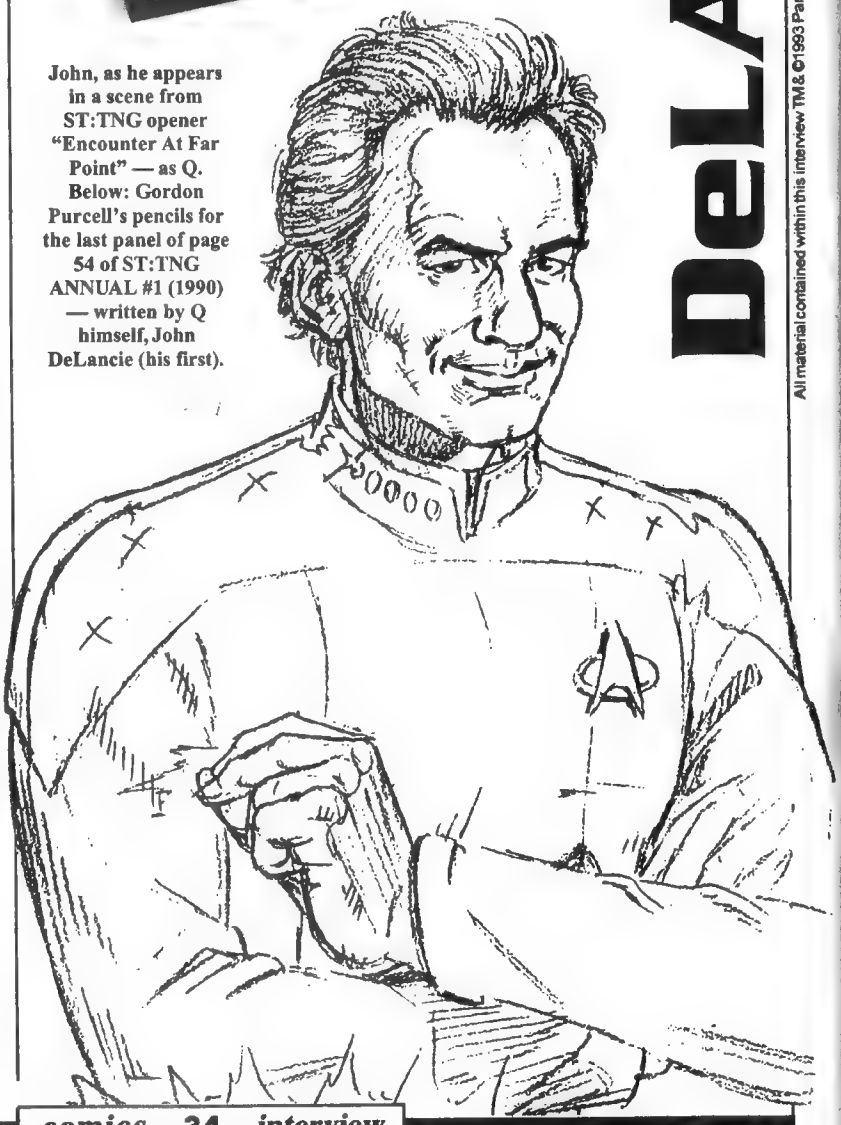
JOHN: MAN AND SUPERMAN: DON JUAN IN HELL by **George Bernard Shaw.** It's a very big play; I mean, the cut version that we're using is . . . I don't know what it's going to come in at, probably three hours and forty-five minutes.

JIM: *Wow.*

JOHN: It's a big undertaking for myself *and* the audience.

JIM: *I don't know if I could do some-*

John, as he appears in a scene from ST:TNG opener "Encounter At Far Point" — as Q. Below: Gordon Purcell's pencils for the last panel of page 54 of ST:TNG ANNUAL #1 (1990) — written by Q himself, John DeLancie (his first).



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ST:TNG ANNUAL #1 pencils by Gordon Purcell, written by DeLancie, featuring Picard and Q.

"I've written a number of things but I'd never

thing that long. The longest show I've done was about two hours and afterwards I was completely drained.

JOHN: It's a physical event as well as a mental event, you know. You plan for it. It's a little bit like mountain climbing, you don't just pack a lunch and decide to run up the mountain. So, this has been planned out and we're getting down to the wire and it looks like it's going to be okay.

JIM: *Going on to your STAR TREK work, how did you get the part of Q?*

JOHN: I auditioned. I'm sure there were at least a dozen other people who auditioned, maybe a couple of dozen other people who auditioned, and I just auditioned and got it.

JIM: *Was it basically a cold reading, or improv?*

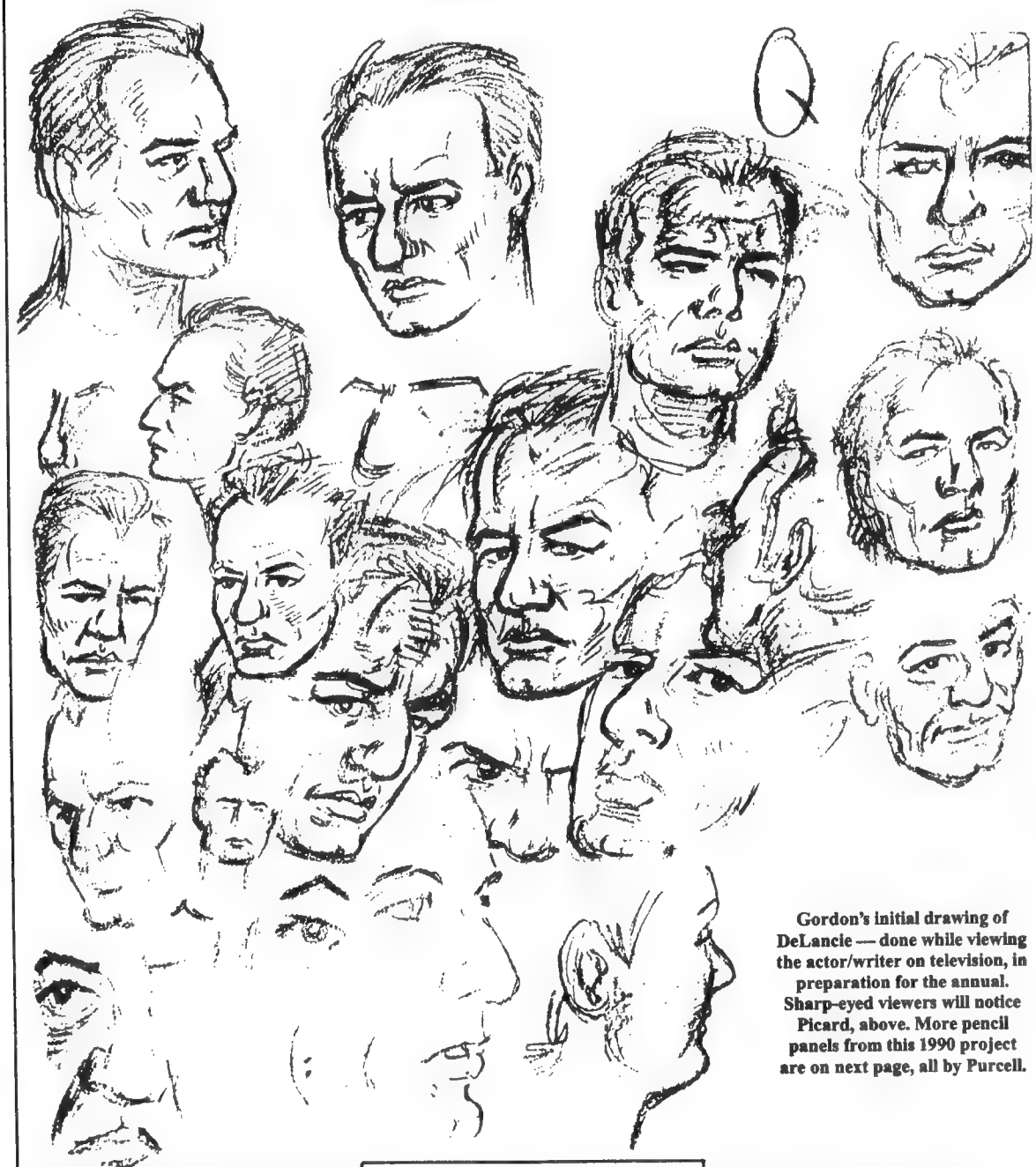
JOHN: No, it wasn't a cold reading because I had the material before. I looked at it . . . for half an hour or so before. It was very pedestrian, the way I got it. It wasn't anything *special,* I just walked in and read and they liked it, asked me to come back, I did it again and they offered me the role. Sometimes when things are meant to be it becomes kind of deceptively easy.

JIM: *That simple, huh?*

JOHN: Yeah.

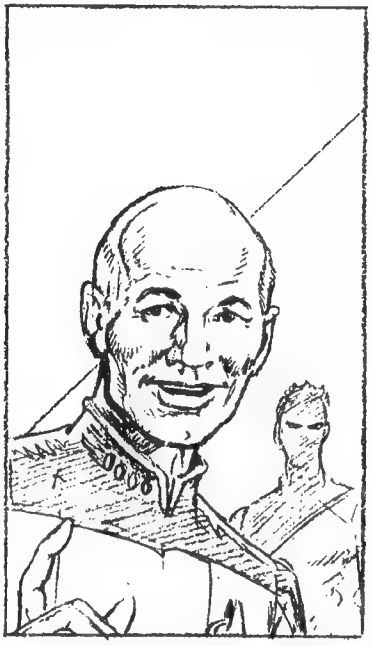
JIM: *How would you explain the character of Q? A god?*

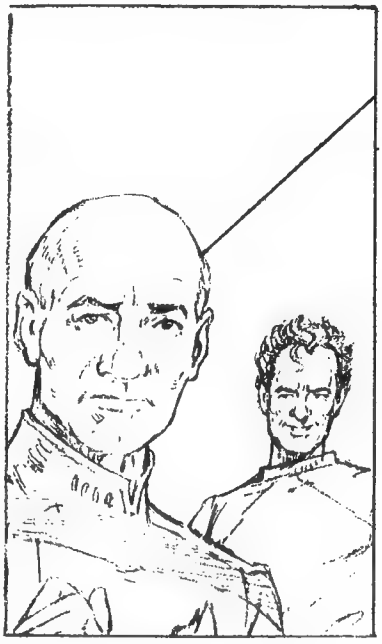
JOHN: Well, everyone wants to know that. I think what he is — to keep the options open — is that he has the *capacity*



Gordon's initial drawing of DeLancie — done while viewing the actor/writer on television, in preparation for the annual. Sharp-eyed viewers will notice Picard, above. More pencil panels from this 1990 project are on next page, all by Purcell.

written a comic book and I thought it might be fun."





to be anything he wants any time that he wants, for any *reason* that he wants.

JIM: *Do you ever feel that maybe he's too powerful?*

JOHN: I never feel he's *too* powerful. *(Laughter.)* No, no. In each script — you know, there have been only a few presentations of Q — they seem to keep on exploring different ways.

JIM: *Are you going to be making any appearances in the next season?*

JOHN: I have no idea; I wouldn't know. I would be the *last* to know.

JIM: *How did you get involved in writing the comic-book annual?*

JOHN: I was approached by DC to write the annual, that's all.

JIM: *And did you just say okay? Had you been writing; is it something you like to do?*

JOHN: I have written a number of things, but I had never written a comic book and I thought that it might be fun to do.

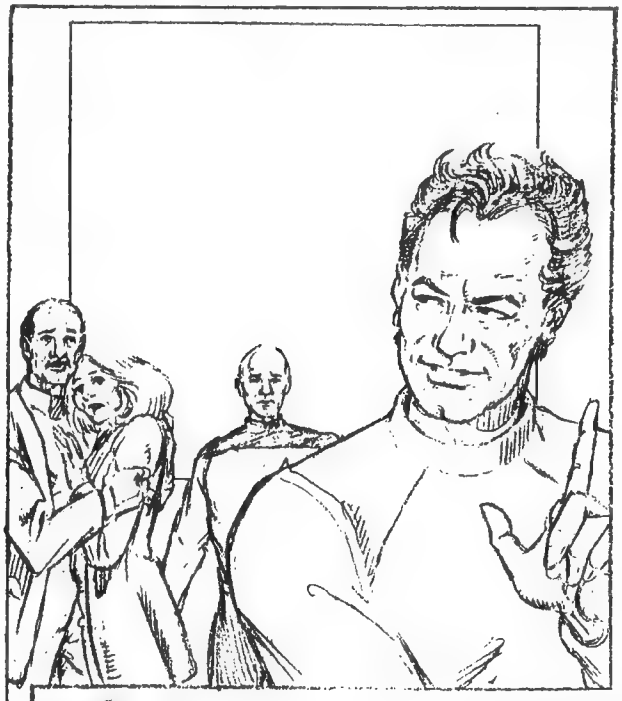
JIM: *I liked the story. It showed a different side of Q than what we're used to seeing. Is that something you might like to see done as an episode one day?*

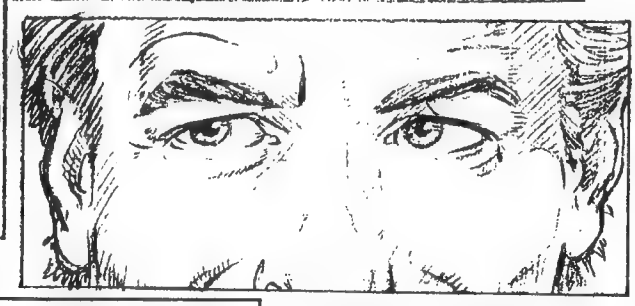
JOHN: Well, I would certainly like to see it filmed simply because . . . I mean, why not! But it *won't* be filmed. *(Laughter.)*

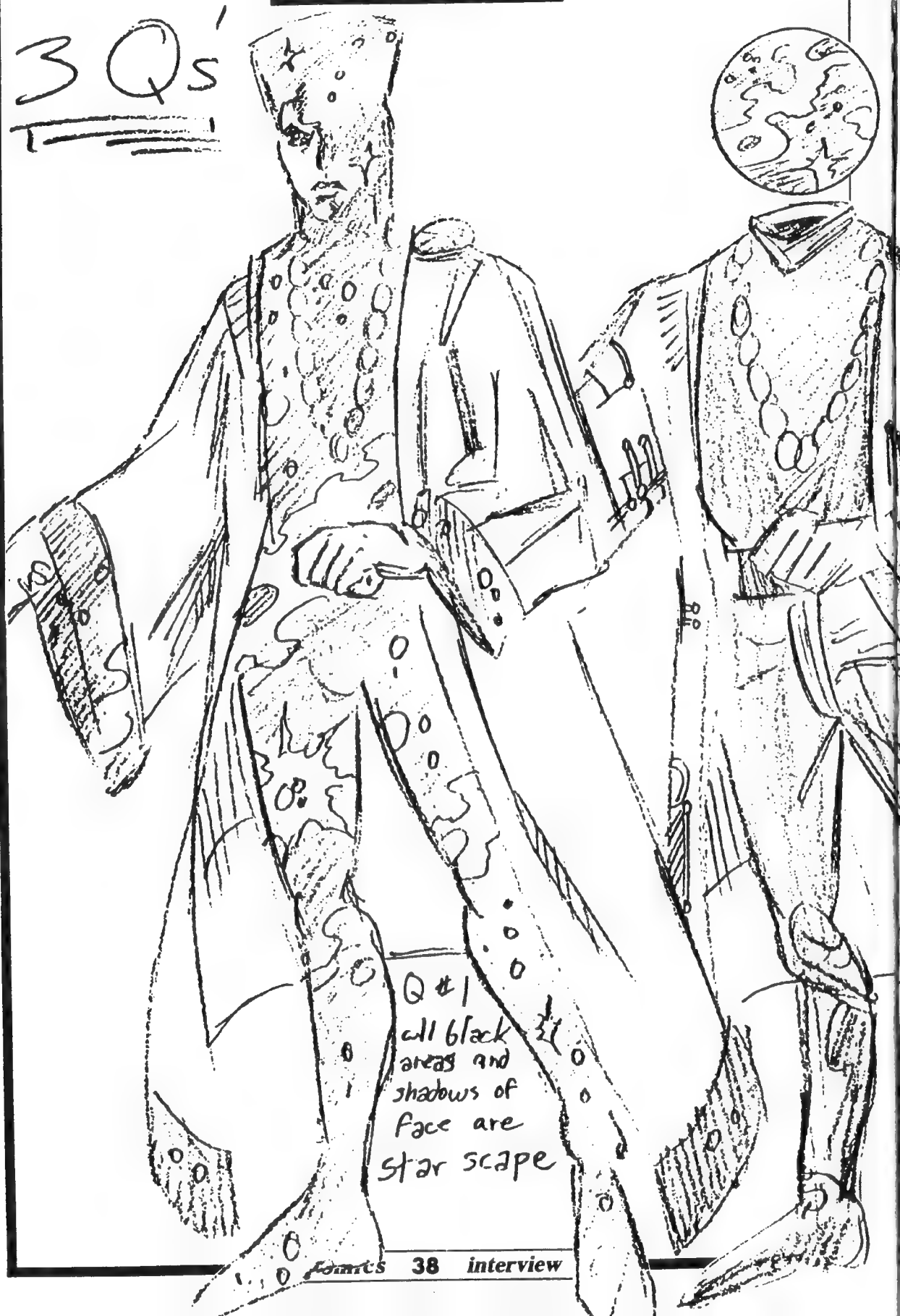
JIM: *I think one of the first things people recognize you for is for THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES, the soap you did. How long did you do that?*

JOHN: I did that for about three and a half years, I think.

JIM: *Did you find after that that you were kind of typecast, or find it hard*






3 Q's
Q #1
all black
areas and
shadows of
face are
star scape

From Gordon Purcell's sketchbook: three designs for Q's regal judge form for the previously-mentioned ST:TNG ANNUAL #1. John requested a combination of the first and third drawing — directly above.

"Place me in the category of a 'soap' actor."

More of Gordon's uninked material from the annual, with Riker and Worf.

getting other parts after that?

JOHN: No. People who are in decision-making positions usually don't watch the soaps. *(Laughter.)* They don't. As a matter of fact, I don't really say that I did the soap because — although I'm happy with what I did *on* it — if somebody had never seen it they would place me in the category of being a "soap" actor, which is an unfortunate characterization considering the fact that there's just as much junk on prime-time television. Maybe even more so. Actually more so! You know, the prejudices that people have — and that I have, actually, towards it — just make me kind of play it down. Although it was a very enjoyable time.

JIM: *Would you ever want to do any more soaps or is that pretty much over?*

JOHN: I would never say anything is over.

THE WORLD'S FIRST

JAE LEE

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ENTITY COMICS

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"I jumped at the chance to start DR. KILDARE

KEN BALD

Ken Bald, a native New Yorker, broke into illustration for national advertising accounts shortly after World War II. In the early 1940s some of the comic-book characters he drew were Bullet Man, Doc Savage and the Black Owl. He sometimes used the pen name "K. Bruce."

Inspiration for many of his female characters came from his charming wife, an actress and model. He also used

Dark Shadows
WITH HIS SPECIAL POWERS, BARNABAS SENSES A THREAT IN THE PRESENCE OF LUCAS PENROSE BELL AT COLLINWOOD...
I FEEL THESE OMINOUS VIBRATIONS... THAT HIS PRESENCE HERE IS AN OMEN OF DISASTER FOR ELIZABETH AND CAROLYN... AND ME!

LUCAS PENROSE BELL HAS CONVINCED ALICE RIGBY THAT THE EERIE, GHOST-LIKE FIGURE SHE CAPTURED ON FILM IS MERELY A DOUBLE EXPOSURE...
B-BUT I *THOUGHT* I SAW SOMEONE STANDING THERE, MR. BELL. AND YOU MUST ADMIT, IT *DOES* LOOK WEIRD!

DARK SHADOWS ©1993 Dan Curtis Productions, Inc. / DR. KILDARE, JUDD SAXON ©1993 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

when MGM approached King about a strip."

himself, his children, and friends and relatives as models for many of the characters and/or situations.

Ken Bald drew three syndicated newspaper strips during his career. The first, JUDD SAXON, was run as a daily feature by King Features. Next, King asked him to do DR. KILDARE, which was based on the popular TV series with actor Richard Chamberlain. His favorite strip, DARK SHADOWS, with witches, warlocks, ghosts, and a haunted house, and Barnabas Collins as the main character. Barnabas sleeps the sleep of the "undead." This feature, like DR. KILDARE, was also based on a popular TV series.

Spanning a wide range of artistic creativity, including fashion illustrations for Paul Stuart, movie posters for Warner Bros., ad brochures, TV storyboards, comic books and strips, Ken Bald's high quality of realistic art is abundant in all aspects of the commercial art world for over 50 years . . .

Ken's favorite strip — DARK SHADOWS.

BUT—WHY WOULD HE WANT TO HARM US?
WHATEVER DIABOLICAL SCHEME LUCAS PENROSE BELL IS HATCHING IN THERE— I MUST KNOW OF IT!
PHOTOS BEING DEVELOPED
PLEASE KNOCK BEFORE ENTERING
MOMENTS LATER, BARNABAS IS ALONE IN THE DARKROOM...
YES, THIS IS THE GHOST OF A COLLINS ANCESTOR! BUT—WHICH ONE? AND WHY DOES HE STALK THE HALLS OF COLLINWOOD...
Bruce 4-11
© 1971, Dan Curtis Productions, Inc.
TO BE CONTINUED

R. ROBERT POLLAK: *In what year did you graduate from Pratt Institute?*

KEN BALD: 1941.

ROBERT: *What were your first jobs in the art field, including comics?*

KEN: Went right from Pratt to work for **Jack Binder** in Englewood, NJ. The studio moved to 507 Fifth Avenue in 1942. Jack had made me art director by then. We had about 30 people at the time. I stayed with him until I went into the Marine Corps on December 7th, 1943.

ROBERT: *How and in what year did you get involved with King Features?*

KEN: In 1956 we tried to sell a strip called THREE AGAINST THE CITY. King eventually turned it down but liked my art and said they would contact me when they thought they had a good script. Just about a year later they contacted me with JUDD SAXON.

ROBERT: *JUDD SAXON, the corporate trouble-shooter strip, was distributed only as a daily feature. Why wasn't there a Sunday page?*

KEN: It never quite achieved the success we hoped for. That's why I jumped at the chance to start DR. KILDARE when M-G-M approached King with the idea of a syndicated strip. It started right off with both Sundays and dailies.

ROBERT: *Did you write the stories? If not, who did?*

KEN: **Jerry Brondfield** wrote the JUDD SAXON strip. **Elliott Kaplan** (brother of **Al Capp**) wrote the DR. KILDARE strip. Elliott also supervised the DARK SHADOWS stories. At the moment I can't recall the actual author for a certainty; it could have been **Howard Lenz.**

ROBERT: *How long did JUDD SAXON run in the newspapers?*

KEN: Six years.

ROBERT: *When did King Features offer you DR. KILDARE, a strip based on the popular TV series with Richard Chamberlain?*

KEN: Early 1962 or late 1961.

ROBERT: *What were the restrictions involved in drawing a strip reflecting a television series?*

KEN: I had to make everything dealing with the medical world as authentic as possible, which necessitated quite a large reference file. The North Miami General Hospital was my interim source. I also had to remember not to put nurses in high heels. I slipped up once and had to answer many letters.

ROBERT: *Did anyone help you out on*

"DARK SHADOWS was my favorite because

FATHER!!
FORSYTHE-- CALL BLAIR. TELL THEM IT'S KILDARE AND TO GET AN AMBULANCE DOWN HERE FAST.
CONSIDER IT DONE.
LATER...
RANDY!! YOU ARE STILL HERE!?
WELL, WHERE DID YOU EXPECT ME TO BE-- WATCHING MY IMMENSE INVESTMENTS GROW AND FLOURISH??
FATHER!!
KEN BALD 7-15
FORSYTHE-- CALL BLAIR. TELL THEM IT'S KILDARE AND TO GET AN AMBULANCE DOWN HERE FAST.
CONSIDER IT DONE.
LATER...
RANDY!! YOU ARE STILL HERE!?
WELL, WHERE DID YOU EXPECT ME TO BE-- WATCHING MY IMMENSE INVESTMENTS GROW AND FLOURISH??

Above: How Bald did DR. KILDARE. Below: Panel from JUDD SAXON (1960). Note how Ken's heavy use of blacks adds strength and dramatic impact to his art.

THEN YOU AND I OUGHT TO FORM A PARTNERSHIP, MONIQUE. I FEEL LIKE A WINNER... ARCHER-DURELLE, LTD.
A PARTNERSHIP SOUNDS DELIGHTFUL, DEREK...!
HEY, BUDDY-BOY, PICK IT UP! THAT'S A CUE SHE JUST TOSSED YOU...!

the art over the years and did you "ghost" for other artists when they were in a pinch?

KEN: On my first strip, JUDD SAXON, a fine friend and artist, **Jim Kelly,** helped me on backgrounds. For the first couple of years of DR. KILDARE another friend, **Ed Allgor,** helped with my backgrounds. No one ever helped with the figures. DARK SHADOWS was all mine, as the background was such an integral part of the whole.

No, I never ghosted for another artist.

ROBERT: *When and why did DR. KILDARE retire from syndication?*

# of mood and because I'm a fan of the occult."

Ken Bald did this full-page illustration for Jim Steranko's HISTORY OF COMICS (1972).

KEN: Approximately 1987. My advertising work load became too much. I had to spend entire weekends doing the strip. When I told them I would like to quit, they asked me to stay another six months, so they could hire another artist. I did stay the six months, but they were unable to come up with anyone else.

ROBERT: *Tell us how you got involved with doing DARK SHADOWS, another strip, based on the vampire television series in 1971.*

KEN: I remember meeting with **Dan Curtis** in his office in New York City to talk about it. I believe he had seen my DR. KILDARE strip and that **Elliott Kaplan** was responsible for getting us together. King Features was hesitant about taking it on but NEA did. Because of DR. KILDARE I could not use the name **"Ken Bald"** so I used my first initial and my middle name.

ROBERT: *DARK SHADOWS only ran through 1971. Why do you think it was so short-lived?*

KEN: Not enough people believed in a vampire hero. New York City, Chicago, Detroit, L.A., San Francisco and other West Coast and Northeastern cities loved it. However, the middle states and the South just didn't warm to it. It wasn't profitable enough for me to continue it.

ROBERT: *I understand that you have used models as well as photographs as reference to enhance the realistic quality of your work. Please tell us a little about the artistic process involved in doing these features and who you would use as models.*

KEN: I very often used Polaroids to work from. My family and I, and sometimes my friends, were my models.

ROBERT: *I've seen a lot of the art for SAXON, KILDARE and DARK SHADOWS. Many are fantastic in your use of darks to create a mood. I also enjoy the details used in the lush jungle sequences. Which strip or characters were your favorites?*

KEN: DARK SHADOWS was my favorite because of mood and the opportunity of using Gothic props to design the panels — but, most of all, because I've always been a fan of the occult.

ROBERT: *You also mentioned that you did some movie posters for Warner Bros. in the 1950s and '60s. What were the titles of the movies, if you recall?*

KEN: HELL ON FRISCO BAY (1956), **Alan Ladd, Edward G. Robinson** and **Joanne Dru**; SERENADE (1956) with **Mario Lanza, Joan Fontaine** and **Sarita Montrel**; THE SEARCHERS; PROUD REBEL; OLD YELLER. There were more, and most of them were for Warner Bros.

ROBERT: *You were always involved in illustrations or advertising art. Your realistic style no longer graces the newspaper's comic sections. Where have you focused your talents in art over the last decade?*

KEN: Most of the time I am doing comprehensives for advertising art or storyboards for TV. I'm represented by Genn Studio Inc., 420 Lexington Avenue, New York City 10170.

ROBERT: *Thank you for enlightening us on your long and illustrious career.*

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 2[illegible]uite 301 New York, NY 10001

REN & STIMPY: THE REAL STORY?

Dear DAK:

I have enjoyed reading your magazine for a few years now. However, the latest issue, which interviews **Bill Wray** for the "real story" of REN & STIMPY, contains some factual errors on Bill's part. It's strange that he admits to getting his information second hand and even third hand, but claims to have the "real story." Bill was a background painter on the show when he was at Spumco, as well as working on two storyboards. This was the extent of his involvement. How he could know the "real story" is a mystery.

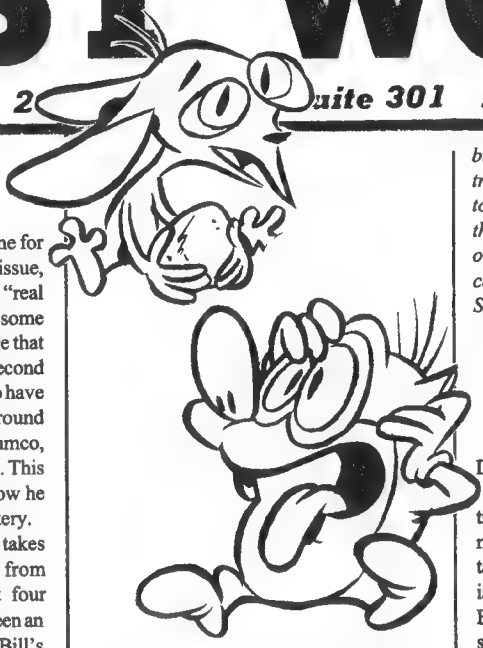
An episode of REN & STIMPY takes about eight months to complete, from conception to post-production, not four months as Bill said. This could have been an honest mistake or just ignorance on Bill's part.

As for Victor and his dad, two characters from the "Visit to Anthony" episode, they were created by **John Kricfalusi, Rich Pursel** and myself, *not* at Games. Games didn't exist when this episode was written. Bill should know this, or else he didn't see that episode.

The cow character was from an episode of MIGHTY MOUSE, THE NEW ADVENTURES. The fact that he was a male cow that had an udder was what distinguished him. How Bill can claim this as a new character is absurd. Changing the name doesn't make it original.

Also, Bill said the show was successful not because John was good at his job but that everything else was so bad. Now, anyone who has ever worked with John, Bill included, knows that the show worked precisely because John knows how to do it well. The people in charge at Games have never animated a scene in their lives, or timed a show on exposure sheets or created any characters that are remembered anywhere. Since Games took over the shows are farther behind schedule, over budget (everyone got a big raise) and the quality has noticeably dropped, so their whole reason for taking over is not valid. It was just an act of pure piracy and Bill, Bob and the others are accessories.

As for the drawings included in the interview (none of which were drawn by Bill), one in particular caught my attention. The cover of R&S #5, signed by **Bill Wray,** was drawn by me for the sci-fi intro of season #1. Now he knows he didn't draw it, yet willfully signed his name to it.



Bill also had a lot to say about deadlines being missed. To begin with, most of the deadlines were met the first season. The second season, Nick started to ignore the schedule completely, by refusing to approve stories and boards no matter how many times we warned them about falling behind. As for the idea of doing cheater cartoons to make time for particular episodes, this *was* done as can be seen in the episodes directed by **Bob Camp.** "Out West," "In the Army," and "Monkey See Monkey Don't" were done quickly so that special episodes like "Son of Stimpy," "Kilted Yaksmen," and "Visit to Anthony" could be done with more quality.

Bill also said that John wasn't the reason for the success of R&S. On the contrary, anybody who has worked with John knows that it is his vision that makes the show stand out. Bill even said this in an interview done before the big takeover — astounding!

There were other inaccuracies in the article, but I didn't have time to address them all. But I thought you might want to hear the "real story."

Keep up the good work on the magazine. Just be more careful who you interview.

Sincerely,
Some guy named Jim Smith
Art Director
Spumco
5625 Melrose Ave.
Hollywood, CA 90038

We're very happy to hear from you, Jim, with the Spumco side of "the real story" — but readers should be made aware that we tried and tried to talk to John K. for #122, too, but were unable to nail him down, though certainly not for lack of trying! Hey, our microphones are still open, if John cares to comment on THE REN & STIMPY SHOW for the record.

- DAK

GOING BATS! AN OPEN LETTER TO STEVE ENGLEHART

Dear **Mr. Englehart:**

I am writing to beg you, on behalf of all traditional Batman fans, to do what you must — beg, borrow, steal, wheel, deal - to take over the BATMAN titles. **Denny O'Neil** is *destroying the Batman!!!* This "New Batman" gimmick may boost sales in the short run, but when Marvel does their next gimmick and all the gimmick watchers drop Batman to buy Marvel, and all the base Batman fans like me have been alienated and stop buying — it could be big, long-term trouble for the Dark Knight.

Superman may need a gimmick to save his books — all the Marvel heroes may need gimmicks — The Batman does not need gimmicks!! The Batman is at his best when done very *traditionally!!* Jean-Paul Valley and Tim Drake! I spit on them!! I want Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson back for good!! I want **Steve Englehart** to edit the Bat-titles!!! Please, **Mr. Englehart** — do what you must to get rid of **O'Neil** (who, theoretically, should be a perfect BATMAN editor — yet, somewhere along the lines, failed) and take over! Assign yourself and **Marshall Rogers** to do SHADOW OF THE BAT — **Gerry Conway** and **Gene Colan** to do DETECTIVE — and **Mike Barr, Alan Davis** and **Jim Aparo** to do BATMAN.

To top off this insult, I heard rumors they will have Bruce marry his physical therapist. Bah!! I, in my opinion, believe that Bruce is like a Catholic priest, in that he cannot be faithful to a wife and his calling — he can only serve one justfully. But if he were to get married — the absolute only one for him is Silver St. Cloud, not some minor character created for a gimmick!

Please, **Mr. Englehart** — You must take over!!! Please!!! As for the next Bat-movie, if you have any influence over that — I heard **Joel Schumacker** will direct it. Who the hell is **Joel Schumacker**?? None of my friends have ever heard of this guy!! Get **James Cameron** to direct it!! Or, you know

who could make a cool BATMAN film? That Oriental action director who did **Van Damme's** HARD TARGET — his name escapes me at the moment. I like the idea of **Micky (The Monkees) Dolenz** as the Riddler - that is brilliantly perfect casting!! **Macaulay Culkin** could be a good Robin to **Keaton's** Batman. I hope **Sam Hamm** and **Frank Miller** write the script (while I agree totally that your vision of the Batman is the definitive Batman, I must admit that I think **Sam Hamm's** three-dimensional, "screwed-up" Bruce Wayne is better for a live-action film set in the "real" world).

Thank you, and please take control of the Batman!

Lee Solomon
2839 Marlbank
Sterling Heights, MI 48310

HE SAYS: "HOOEY!"

Dear DAK;

Have you noticed that whenever anybody says "first," "most," "only" or anything of that nature, you get a note from me saying, "Oh, yeah?"

Dennis O'Neil says nobody has ever dealt with the same characters for 50 years, integrating them into this kind of super-story, before. This is arrant tunnel vision, as usual. About ten years ago, I went on a kick of reading Icelandic sagas, which were composed over a period of considerably more than 50 years. I must have read two, maybe even three of the things before I was through (which is more than it sounds like, because they're *excessively* dense in story content), and I was struck by how much their setting resembled a superhero universe.

It goes far beyond the obvious super-heroic aspects of the major characters themselves, although that goes a long way toward setting the tone. More important, the heroes of the various sagas are all connected to one another — maybe by blood, maybe by friendship or a shared adventure, maybe just because they know one another by reputation. And they were constantly making guest appearances in one another's sagas.

What's more, the translators often put in footnotes pointing out these connections. In *BURNT NJAL*, one of the best examples of this practice, I half expected them to be signed "Smilin' Stan."

Grrr . . . Well, that's what I expect of a guy who says only two other periodicals have reached 500 issues before. Obviously, he's only talking about American comic books; otherwise, LIFE magazine and 2000AD would not even scratch the surface. Even so, offhand I can think of three—*ADVENTURE COMICS, FOUR COLOR COMICS* and *WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES. (WALT'S even retains its original lead feature.)*

Maybe there are a couple of others, too.

Now, I'm going to make a "first" claim of my own, but I'm too smart to do it without any hedging. I just toss this out for discussion, and would like to see what others have to say on the subject.

Let's define a "soap opera" as one of those stories presented to a mass audience about people just like you and me only with much more dramatic lives, in which an important element is the fact that the story has no particular beginning or end but is understood as potentially going on forever.

Obviously, the soap opera, by this definition, became possible only with the advent of periodical mass media. But exactly *when* after that advent did it first appear?

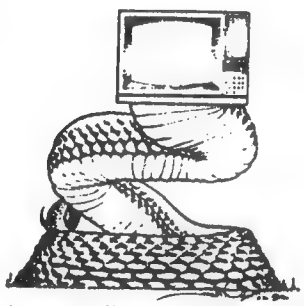
I say the first soap opera was *GASOLINE ALLEY*. Does anybody say I'm wrong?

Don Markstein
14836 N. 35th St.
Phoenix, AZ 85032

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (706) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

INTERVIEW reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

SIMONSON & McGREGOR



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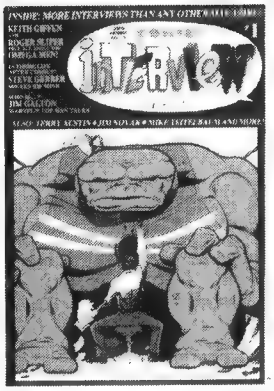
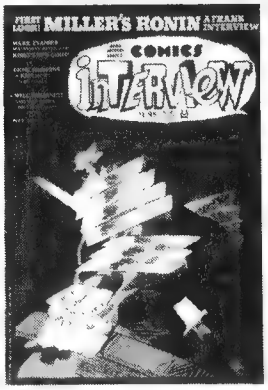
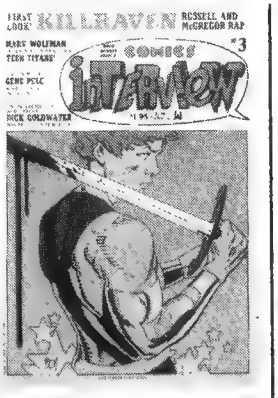


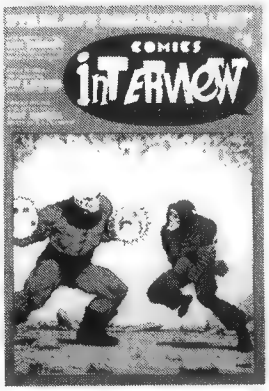
#1-$5.00 **Keith Giffen** on the making of THE OMEGA MEN — **Steve Gerber** speaks out on comics — X-MEN inker **Terry Austin** talks — Marvel's top man, **Jim Galton,** tells all — and much more in this premiere issue!



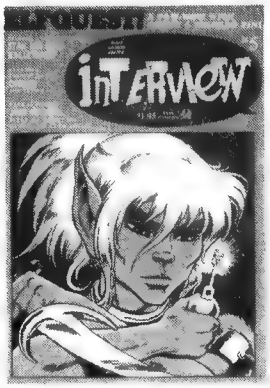
#2-$5.00 **Miller** raps about RONIN — **Mark Evanier** shares secrets of **Kirby's** NEW GODS — **Steve Gerber** asks **Will Meugniot** about DNAGENTS — **Gene Simmons** of KISS on comics — more! Cover by **Frank Miller.**



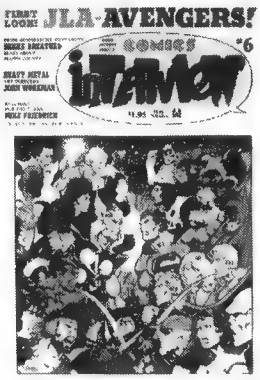
#3 COUNTS AS FIVE **Don McGregor** & **Craig Russell** on KILLRAVEN — Origins of NEW TEEN TITANS told by **Marv Wolfman** — **Howard Chaykin** on AMERICAN FLAGG — French comics by **Neal Adams** — Cover by **Russell.**



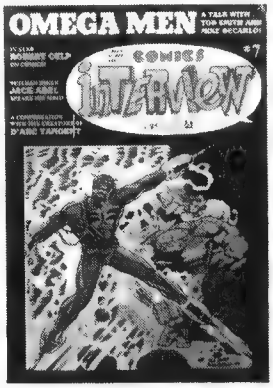
#4 COUNTS AS FIVE **Starlin** speaks about **WARLOCK, CAPTAIN MARVEL & DREADSTAR — DC's Dick Giordano,** part 1 — from **Foster** to **Frazetta,** the last **Roy G. Krenkel** interview — Cover by **Starlin.**



#5-$5.00 **Wendy & Richard Pini** — inside ELFQUEST, part 1 — **Stan Lee,** straight from the shoulder — DC's **Dick Giordano** part 2 — Origins of COMICO. Cover by **Wendy Pini.**



#6 COUNTS AS 3 **George Perez & Roy Thomas** tell all about JLA/AVENGERS feud — inside ELFQUEST, part 2 — **Berke Breathed** blabs about BLOOM COUNTY — more! Awesome cover by **Perez!**



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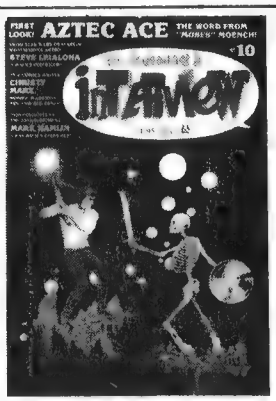
#8-$5.00 **Mike Baron** and **Steve Grant** discuss NEXUS, WHISPER and BADGER — **Bill Griffith** talks about ZIPPY THE PINHEAD — **Richard Burton** on British comics — plus more! Cover by **Steve Rude.**

#9 COUNTS AS FIVE GOD-SIZE ISSUE **Walt Simonson,** the man and his art — grand master **Joe Kubert** gabs — A walk down memory lane with comics giant **Gardner Fox** — much, much more!! THOR cover by **Simonson.**



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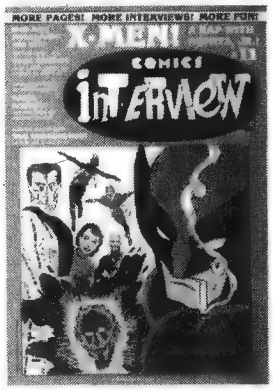

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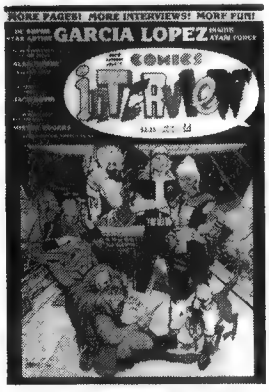

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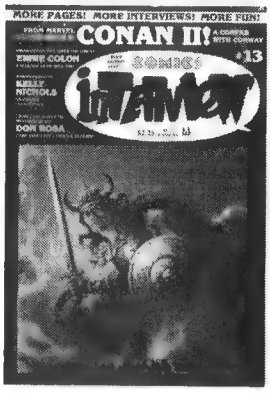

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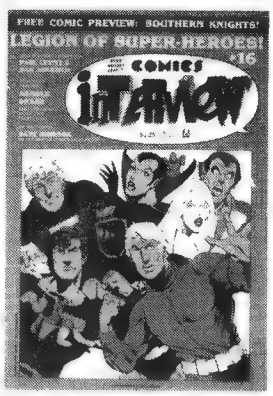

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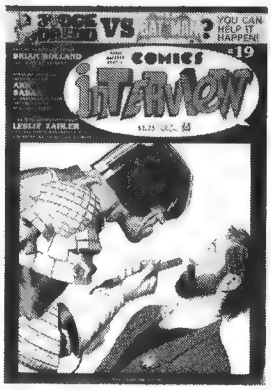

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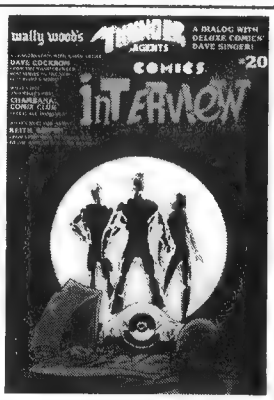

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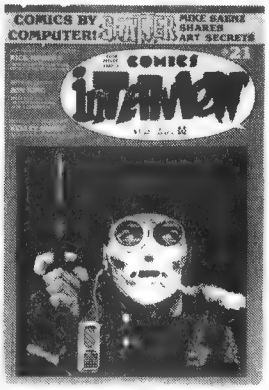

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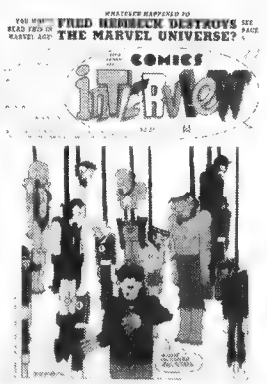

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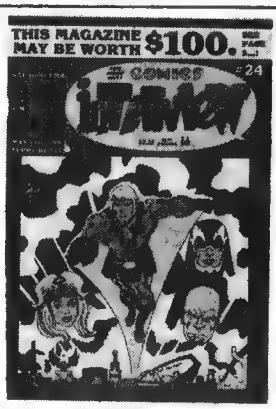

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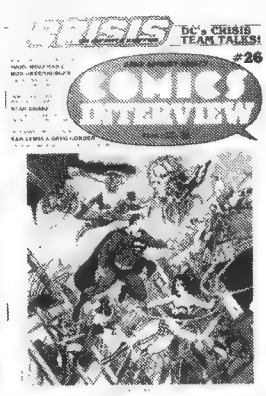

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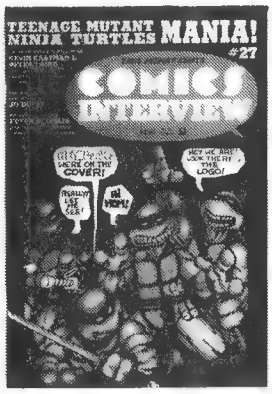

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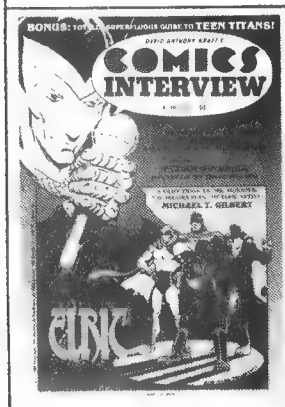

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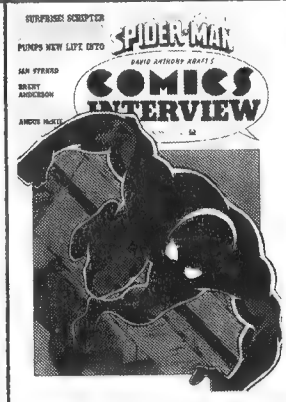

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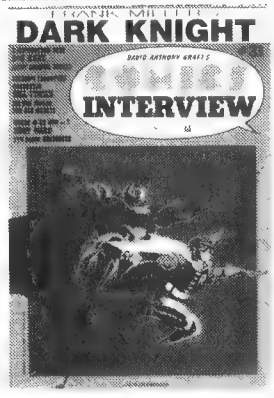

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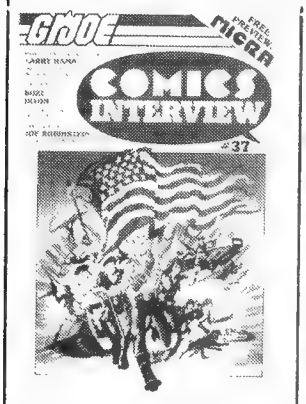

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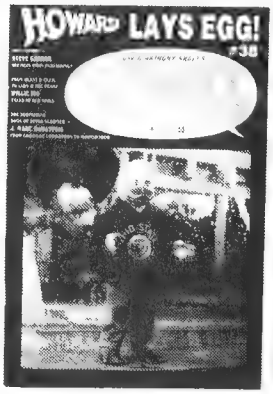

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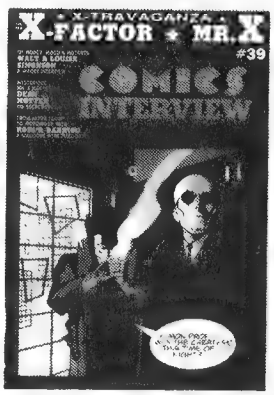

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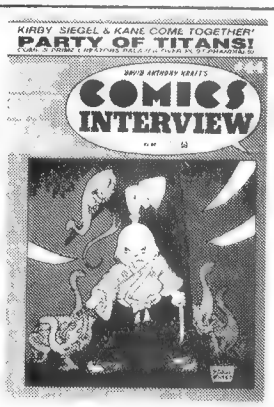

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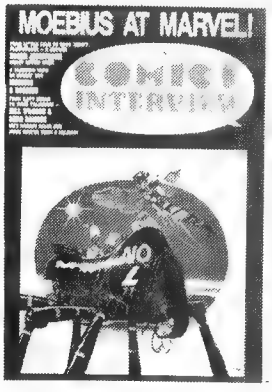

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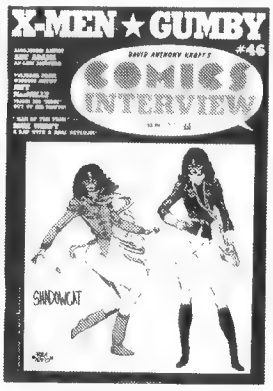

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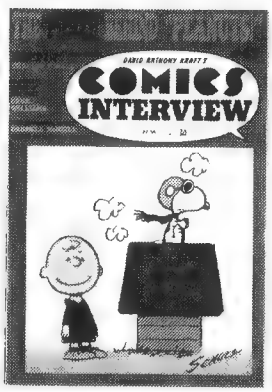

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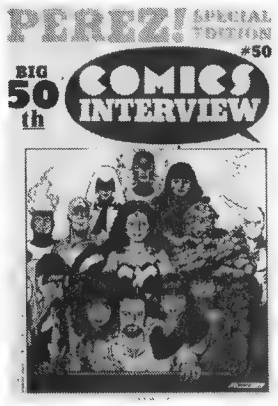

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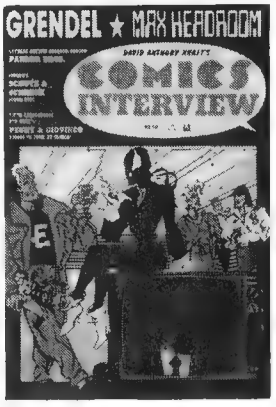

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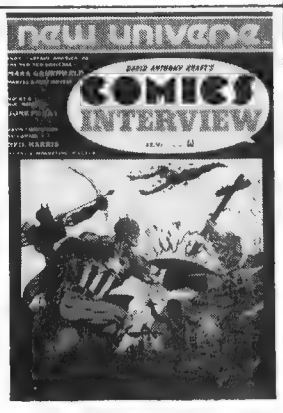

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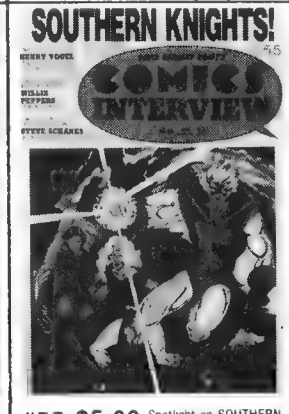

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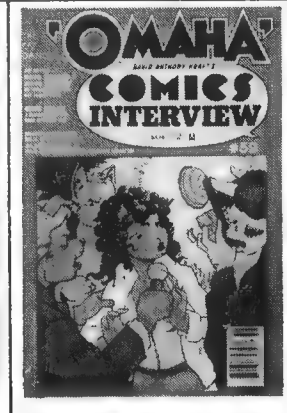

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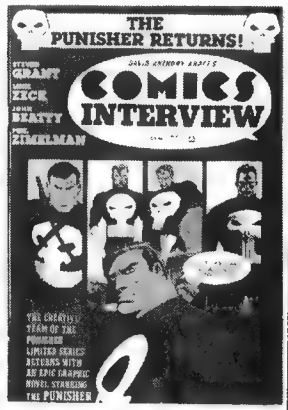

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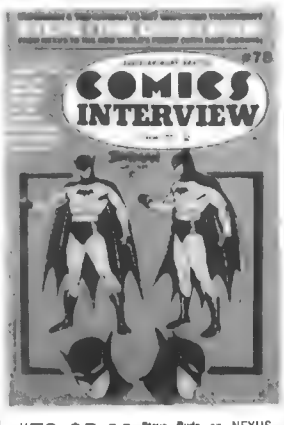

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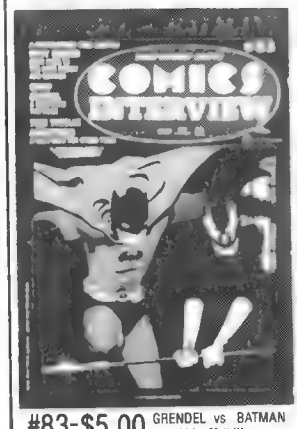

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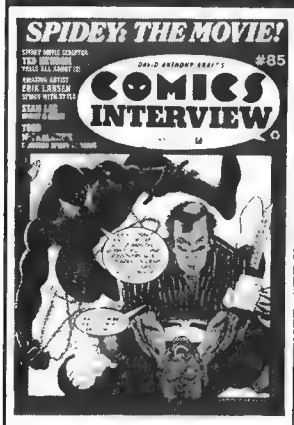

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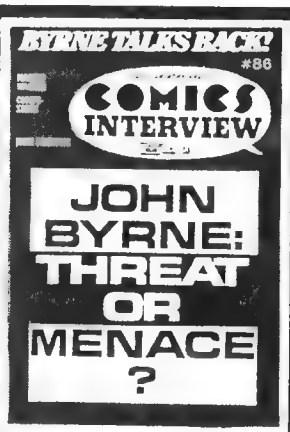

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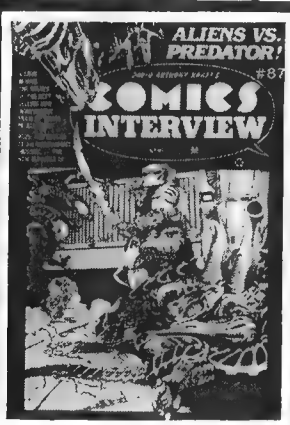

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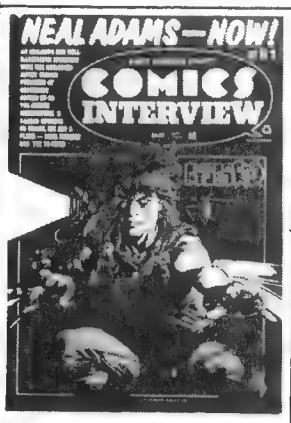

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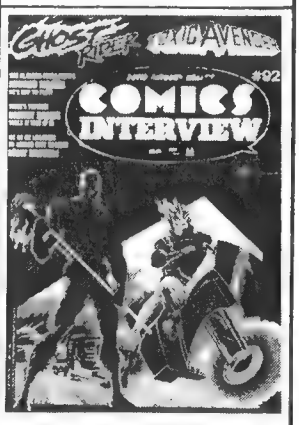

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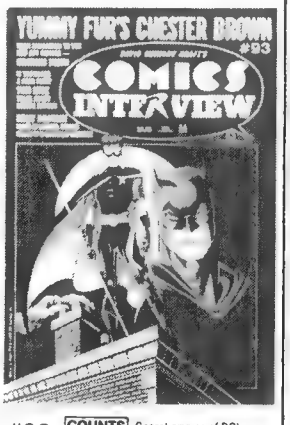

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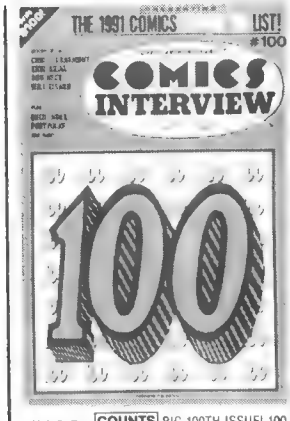

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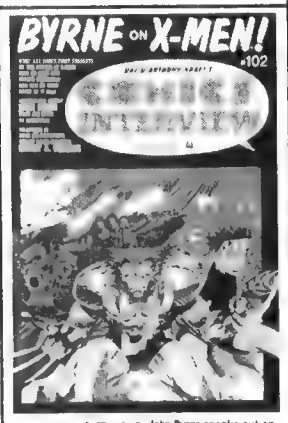

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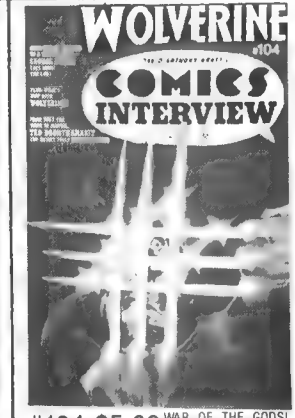

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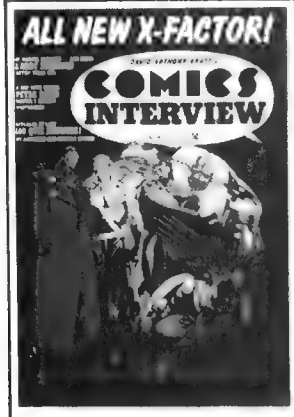

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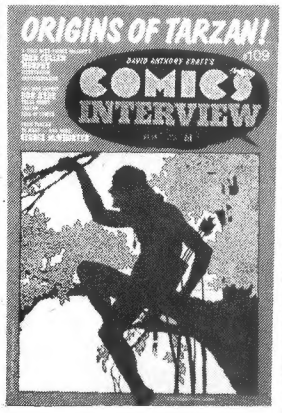

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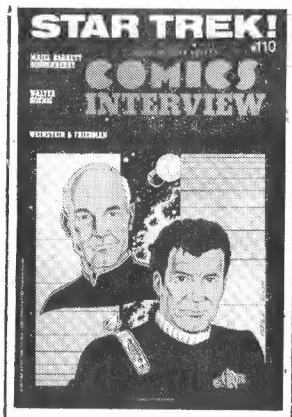

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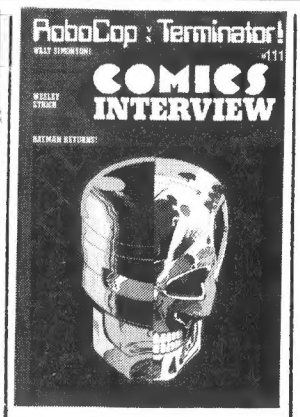

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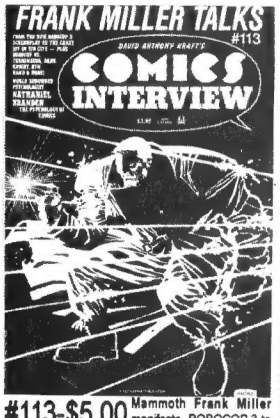

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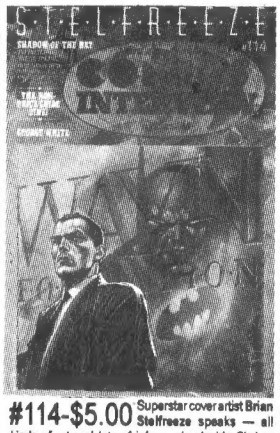

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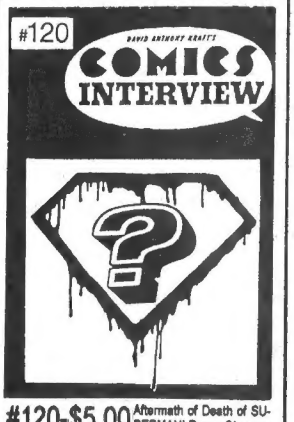

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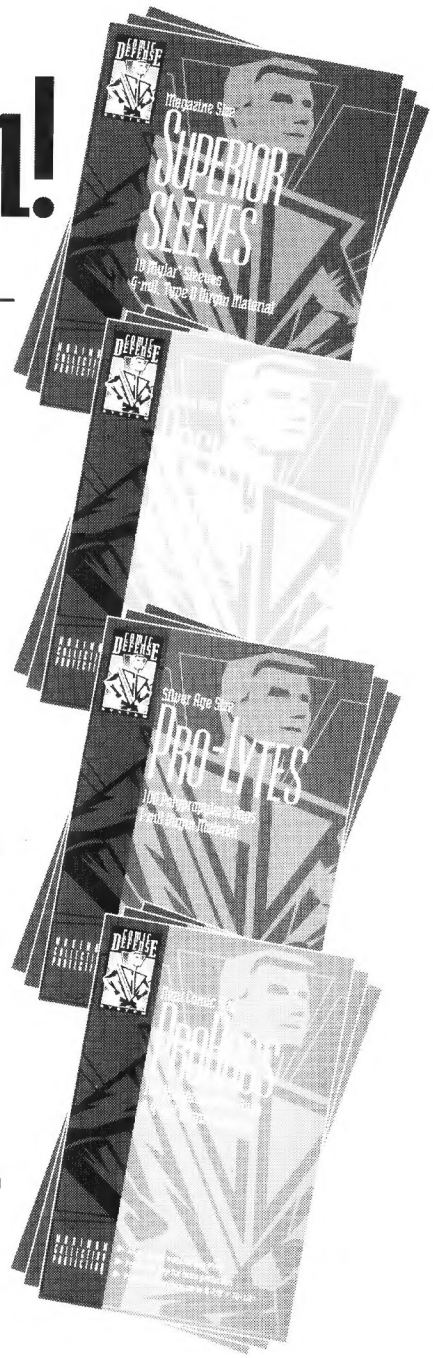

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